NATIONAL

E74-21268

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

ZITA

An experiment in dramatization, founded on the novel by Maurice Baring, The Lonely Lady of Dulwich

by

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(B.L.I., Emerson College, 1919)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1938

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MAURICE BARING

A Biographical Sketch

The Honorable Maurice Baring is one of England's most talented and versatile men. Variously known as diplomat, journalist, soldier, dramatist, poet, critic, and man of letters, he has displayed a prodigious range of accomplishments sufficient to lend renown to several separate careers.

The fourth son of the first Lord Revelstoke, and brother to the present one, Maurice Baring was born April 27, 1874. After his education at Eton and at Trinity College, Cambridge, he spent several years abroad to finish his education in languages, in which he had already shown unusual proficiency and in five or six of which he eventually became fluent.

With such linguistic accomplishments, combined with a cosmopolitan outlook, natural social gifts, high breeding, and equable temperament, it was perhaps natural that Baring should turn to diplomacy as a career. In 1898 he became attaché to the British Embassy in Paris. Subsequently he was transferred to Copenhagen, and later to Rome. He remained in the diplomatic service until 1904.

Coincidentally, Baring was beginning his literary career with the publication in 1899 of Heldesheim, Quatre Pastiches, a parody of four great masters of French style -- Ernest Renan, Pierre Loti, Anatole France, and Paul Bourget.

After his resignation from the foreign service, Baring

entered upon an even more adventurous life, that of following the wars, when he took the long trip to Manchuria as war correspondent of the Morning Post. During the period 1905 to 1908 he remained in Russia and came to know the country intimately, and to love and understand the Russian spirit. His poems on Russia which come out of this period are delicately emotional, and sensitive to the nuances of the Russian temperament.

Many years later, in his retrospective book, The Puppet Show of Memory, Baring gives an autobiographical account of those colorful days of his life, beginning with his studies at school, and ending with a description of his two journeys to Turkey, one during the unrest in Constantinople, and the other during the Balkan war of 1912. He recalls for us his impressions of the Russo-Japanese War, and the first outbreak of revolutionary disorders in Russia, before he was transferred to the newer theaters of journalistic interest. Quite naturally these memoirs include also glances into the activity of the Foreign Office, and some recollections of his personal experiences in diplomatic life.

In 1917, Baring found himself an active participant in war rather than an observer. He served in various capacities in the Royal Flying Corps, and attained the rank of major. He also became Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.

With a life so filled with practical affairs, one wonders at his prolific literary output. He has published nearly fifty volumes, including essays, dramas, travel impressions,

poems, short stories, translations, reminiscences, criticism, and an outline of Russian literature.

In this country he is known chiefly as a novelist, and one who appeals largely to the epicurean literary taste. Since 1929, his American publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, has produced the following works:

The Coat Without Seam, 1929, a novel of intellectual Europe before the war; Darby and Joan, 1936, the tragedy of a woman's life; Friday's Business, 1933, deriving clearly from his Balkan experiences, an account of the amatory and political adventures of a young Englishman in one of the not altogether imaginary Lilliputian kingdoms of Europe; In My End Is My Beginning, 1931, the tragic story of Mary Queen of Scots told through the lips of her four ladies-in-waiting; The Lonely Lady of Dulwich, 1934, which has provided the basis for the accompanying dramatization; and Lost Lectures, 1932, a volume of essays, reminiscences of Eton, Cambridge, London in the '90's, and diplomatic experiences.

Although he is known best in Russia as poet and literary historian, and in America as novelist, it is in London that his dramatic career has centered and his reputation as playwright has been won. In recognition of his long and distinguished career in the London Theater, Mr. Baring was made president of the British League of Dramatists. Among his best known London successes are: The Gray Stocking, 1908; A Tea Party at the House of Calphurnia, 1910; The Green Elephant, 1911;

Katherine Parr, 1912; Calypso, and The Double Game, 1913.

Other Baring publications which are not available in this country are: The Black Prince, Gaston de Foix, With the Russians in Manchuria, Mahasena Desiderio, A Year in Russia, Collected Poems, A Triangle, C, Half a Minute's Silence, Cat's Cradle, Daphne Adeane, Tinker's Leave, Comfortless Memory, and Roger Peckham.

Baring's prose style is limpid, urbane, delicate; his force is that of understatement. Structurally, his novels have a sense of drama, though his apparent carelessness of touch in the telling of the story seems to suggest an almost extempore re-creation of a remembered scene. That this casualness is deliberate, one recognizes from his own declaration of devotion to what he calls "the line of divine simplicity, where there is nature and nothing else, no style, no ornament, no effort, just the ordinary simple thing said in the simplest possible way with the result that it is sublime, inimitable, and unapproachable."

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Prologue

A garden in Dulwich. Summer, 1920.

ACT I

Scene 1. Robert Harmer's apartment in Paris. July, 1877.
Scene 2. Bertrand's studio. Two weeks later.

ACT II

Scene 1. The Harmer apartment. May, 1880.
Scene 2. The same. Three days later.

ACT III

Scene 1. Wallington. April, 1887.
Scene 2. The hotel gardens at Haréville. July, 1887.

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

In the order of their appearance

Mr. Hanson

Mr. Boller

Curate

Effie

Wilbur

Henriette

Robert Harmer

Zita Harmer

Amelia Legge

Madeleine Laurent

Jean de Bosis

Bertrand

Mrs. Rylands

Walter Price

Cyril Legge

Clark

First Woman, Second Woman, First Military Gentleman, Second Military Gentleman, Waiter, Young Man, First Young Thing, Second Young Thing, First Porter, Second Porter.

Hotel Guests, Waiters, Musicians, et cetera.

PROLOGUE

(An auction is about to be held in the garden of a small, unpretentious villa in Dulwich. The garden is unusually beautiful, betraying the love and skill of a devoted owner. The cottage wall at the right is smothered in roses; at the rear it forms a background for a bank of Madonna lilies. A formal pattern of walks leads among beds of verbena, geranium, sweet william, and pinks. At the left, under a tree, the auctioneer's stand has been placed. Heaped behind and about it, is a pathetic miscellany of house furnishings of the Victorian era, which includes a fine set of volumes on gardening, a book of French poems, and a small old-fashioned portfolio writing desk. An early pianoforte, a few Landseer and Frith engravings, a crucifix, and an engraving of a Rembrandt Holy Family are also in view.

(The time is early afternoon in the summer of 1920. The auctioneer and his assistant are making lists and conferring in undertones. He is a broad, red man, perspiring profusely. The crowd is arriving. It includes curious spectators as well as prospective purchasers. They drift about, in and out the cottage door, fingering everything. Some find seats in the folding chairs set up in the cleared space among the flower beds. There is a general undertone of casual chatter. Mr. Hanson, an elderly solicitor, seems to be in general charge. He is obviously fidgeting.)

MR. HANSON. (To the auctioneer, looking at his watch.) Still lacks ten minutes to the hour, Mr. Boller. I suppose we couldn't commence now?

MR. BOLLER. It's not the law, as you know, sir. But we'll make things move fast, that I'll promise you, once we're off. Not half the townspeople are here yet, and you know they'll not lose this chance of seeing Mrs. Harmer's house and garden. And who can blame them, after thirty years of curiosity?

MR. HANSON. Thirty years! Has it actually been thirty years since I last saw Zita Harmer? Incredible. -- By the way,

Kenneth Harmer has been heard from at last. He is Mrs. Harmer's sole legatee, you know. Will you be so kind as to express him this set of Tennyson? Odd bequest. Here is his address. He's with the fleet in Gibraltar for six weeks. Be careful these books are not offered for sale.

MR. BOLLER. Right, sir. (To his assistant.) Mr. Meigs, take these inside and box them.

MR. HANSON. Will the bidding be lively, do you think, Boller?

MR. BOLLER. That I can't say, sir. The deceased's effects are not very valuable, begging your pardon. But the crowd will come, Mrs. Tinker tells me, just to see where old Mrs. Harmer lived and what kind of cups she drank her tea from.

MR. HANSON. Mrs. Tinker?

MR. BOLLER. (Sotto voce.) Her maid, sir. That lady, holding the spaniel. I think she's here to bid on a few trinkets. Devoted she was, sir. (To the curate, approaching.) Good afternoon, sir. It's a treat to see you again at an auction. You always bid so cheerful like, and I can always hear your figure. I suppose it's your pulpit voice, sir?

CURATE. Ah, Boller, you should know by now that auctions are my besetting vice. But you did me a bad turn last week, oh, a very bad turn.

MR. BOLLER. Ah?

CURATE. When you hypnotized me in your frenzy into buying that copy of Baudelaire. Yes, yes, I know it's a first edition, but Boller, after all you must think of my parishioners. Lady

Walmesley looked at me very coldly after church yesterday. Now, old Mrs. Harmer's library must be quite safe, eh, Boller?

MR. BOLLER. You won't find much here, sir. Her Tennyson has been willed to her nephew and everything else is on that table. Just a few odd novels and some books on gardening.

CURATE. Fancy. Then the dear old soul never even read. What did she do with herself? (He moves over to the table.) Ah, these are splendid works in horticulture. I shall bid on them. Mind you don't encourage my antagonists.

(Two American tourists appear at the gate of the garden wall. He carries the inevitable umbrella, she the Baedeker. They are young, honeymooning, romantic.)

EFFIE. Here it is, Wilbur. Oh, charming! Darling, I want the whole house and especially the garden.

WILBUR. Not bad.

EFFIE. Are you sure you gave me everything but one pound? You know what fools we are in buying junk, and positively we can't make the boat if we spend a cent over a pound.

WILBUR. I'll be careful. Not much here, anyway. Who was this old lady? Why is everyone so excited and curious?

EFFIE. The girl in the draper's shop told me all there is to know. She was a recluse, very beautiful, but a total mystery. She walked in the park, tended her flowers, lived alone with one elderly maid, equally uncommunicative. She went nowhere, saw no one. Everyone wondered why she dropped into this little village thirty years ago. When she smiled, they say, she was ineffably lovely. Think of it -- all those years here and no one knew her. How lonely she must have been.

WILBUR. Say, she was a Catholic. Here's a crucifix. -- These flowers are certainly beautiful. There is something, after all, in English gardens. How'd you like this old piano?

EFFIE. Oh, darling, on one pound? Besides, what should we do with it? But isn't it precious? (She runs her fingers over the keys.) It tinkles like a spinet.

(The crowd begins to settle down in chairs. It is very nearly time to begin.)

WILBUR. Not much time to look things over now. What's this book? It looks old. Here, read it, it's in French.

EFFIE. (Reads.) "Poems, by Jean de Bosis. Paris, 1880." Oh, I believe it's a first edition! Here's something on the title page -- do note the violet ink! (Reads, with a strong American accent.) "A Madame Harmer, avec les plus respectueux hommages de Jean de Bosis, le 3 Mai, 1880."

WILBUR. Are they love poems?

EFFIE. M-m, well, here's one, at least.

WILBUR. (Takes the book from her hands.) You know, I believe, I'll bid for that book.

EFFIE. Why?

WILBUR. Oh, I just want to see how Jean paid his respects. Maybe it's not as innocent as it sounds. (Ruminating.) May, 1880. Boy, that's a long time ago. And here I stand with another man's heart in my hands. -- Well, do you see anything you want? Hurry, they're about to begin.

(The auctioneer mounts the rostrum.)

EFFIE. Our bags are bursting now. The only thing I could possibly get in might be this adorable writing desk. Look, it's

sweet! See, how it opens. Oh, I'm sorry. Something dropped out. What is it?

WILBUR. (Picks up a small notebook.) Just an old notebook. Empty, I guess. No, three short entries. (Hurriedly, in a half whisper.) Listen. "New Year's Day, 1894. So far that my doom is, I love thee still. Let no man dream but that I love thee still. Guinevere."

(Wilbur and Effie look intently into each other's eyes.)

EFFIE. What's the rest?

WILBUR. (Reads.) "Good Friday, 1900. Amor meus crucifixus est."

(They look at each other again.)

EFFIE. (Repeats softly.) "My love is crucified." Go on!

WILBUR. "May, 1920. Kenneth came to tea."

EFFIE. (Excitedly.) Darling, I want this desk!

(They reluctantly replace their treasures on the table and stand back awaiting their turn to bid, as the auctioneer raises his hammer and bawls: "La-dees and Gentlemen!")

CURTAIN

ACT I

Scene 1

(Paris, July 1877. Robert Harmer's apartment. A tastefully arranged breakfast has been laid in the sitting room connecting the bedrooms of Robert and Zita Harmer. Henriette enters with a large bowl of flowers which she places on the table. She is a competent, practical, little Frenchwoman. The clock strikes eight. Henriette completes the final details, and then knocks on Mr. Harmer's door.)

HENRIETTE. Breakfast is served, monsieur.

ROBERT. (Within.) Have you remembered to bring up the letters?

HENRIETTE. Oui, monsieur.

ROBERT. Please call Madame.

HENRIETTE. Oui, monsieur. (She knocks on Mrs. Harmer's door.)

ZITA. (Within.) In a moment, Henriette. Please ask Mr. Harmer not to wait.

(Robert Harmer emerges. He is a tall, stocky, well-built, middle-aged Englishman, who carries with him an air of solid English respectability. He is dressed for business. He sits at the table and uncovers a platter.)

ROBERT. What has happened to the kidneys this morning, Henriette?

HENRIETTE. Oh, monsieur, Joseph has fear the kidney will tire monsieur's estomac. The monotone, vous comprenez. Joseph has make une petite substitution. Monsieur has eat the kidney tous les jours, tous les jours, since four month. Is it that monsieur will not try --

ROBERT. Henriette, take this stuff away. You must learn

that my breakfast is not to be tampered with. I require broiled kidneys. Be so good as to tell Joseph not to indulge in any more flights of fancy.

HENRIETTE. (Crushed.) Ver' good, monsieur. Will monsieur have his tea now?

ROBERT. I will wait for Mrs. Harmer. Meantime, where is the morning post?

HENRIETTE. Here, monsieur.

ROBERT. (Tosses her a rolled newspaper.) The Times. Put this away for me until tonight.

(Robert shuffles over the letters. One he extracts hurriedly and slips into his pocket unopened. He opens several others and reads them, the last one evidently giving him the most satisfaction. He rereads it intently.

(Zita enters from her bedroom. She is about twenty-seven. Besides being very beautiful, she is moreover one of those women who can always appear exquisite and well-groomed, even in negligee, as now. She crosses to Robert and kisses him lightly on top of the head.)

ZITA. Good morning, Robert. What a nuisance I am. You shouldn't have waited. How warm it is today.

ROBERT. Good morning, dear. Yes, very warm. -- Will you pour the tea now, Henriette? -- Here are cards from Cyril and Amelia Legge for the Embassy garden party. You must plan to go.

ZITA. It's rather stupid going alone to these things. Shan't you be able to get off from the bank?

ROBERT. It's not merely the bank, dear. You know I don't care much for these mixed crowds. The French are such a queer lot.

ZITA. I rather hoped we might get to know some French people.

ROBERT. French people keep to themselves.

ZITA. When father was living he used to know quite a number of persons in Paris. Of course, that was years ago.

ROBERT. I daresay I shouldn't care for the Bohemian set he doubtless knew.

ZITA. He said they were interesting -- writers, and so on.

ROBERT. A frowzy lot, usually, in any country.

ZITA. But he knew all kinds of people, too -- doctors, lawyers and soldiers.

ROBERT. They would be much too clever for me.

ZITA. Papa used to go racing a good deal.

ROBERT. (Grimly.) Yes, he did. (A short silence.)

ZITA. I'll be glad to go to the garden party, if you think I should.

ROBERT. Well, after all, Cyril and Amelia are your only acquaintances in Paris, and Cyril has been most kind to me. In fact, <u>this</u> letter is another evidence of his influence.

ZITA. What is the letter, Robert?

ROBERT. You are to be painted. Here is a letter arranging for your first sitting.

ZITA. (Aghast.) Robert, what an idea --

ROBERT. An idea I am very well pleased with. Doesn't it suit you?

ZITA. Of course, but what made you think of it?

ROBERT. You remember, Sutton has been telling me you ought to be painted.

ZITA. Yes, I thought he was joking.

ROBERT. Not at all. I fancy he knows a good bit about such

things. But the question was, who was to do it? If we were in England, it would be easy to get a fellow who's in the Academy. But who could do it here? (His tone implies they are on a desert island.) He advised me to consult Cyril, which, of course, I should have done anyway. Diplomats know everything -- amazing chaps. Funny thing, they both mentioned Bertrand.

ZITA. Not Maurice Bertrand!

ROBERT. Why not?

ZITA. He's much talked of. He exhibited this spring.

ROBERT. I gathered he's a coming man. But Cyril was equal to everything. He arranged an interview. We went to call at his studio. Do you know, the fellow was most affable, and sensible. Doesn't wear long hair nor a velvet jacket. Seemed quite ordinary. He knows England well. The fact of the matter is, he was educated at Cambridge for a term, which probably accounts for his not being queer and wearing a smock. He was very complimentary to the English. (Complacently.) Says we are the masters in landscape. I saw some of his portraits there. They were very like. Recognized Mrs. Herrington at once. Her husband is prominent on the Stock Exchange. So I plumped it at him -- that I'd like your portrait. He agreed.

ZITA. (Warmly.) Robert, you are being very generous.

ROBERT. I don't mind the money. I gave Cyril carte blanche on the financial arrangements. He knows how to do these things delicately. I want, you know, the kind of picture I can hang on the walls at home without having to explain to everyone who and what it is. Dash it, in spite of all this newfangled talk about

impressionism, or whatever it is, I do like a portrait to be like.

ZITA. Fancy hanging me in Wallington! I am excited. -- Robert, when must we return to England?

ROBERT. How can I possibly tell, my dear, now that I've been given entire charge of the Paris bank?

ZITA. Then it won't be for years?

ROBERT. Probably not.

ZITA. When we do return, shall it be to Wallington?

ROBERT. Of course. Why not?

ZITA. Then, since it is all so far distant, I think perhaps I have the courage now to tell you, Robert, that I shall revolt against MacDonald.

ROBERT. I don't understand.

ZITA. I have suffered from MacDonald. The man is simply relentless. His garden looks as if all the flowers were made of iron. When we go back, mayn't I have a tame gardener? The light and shade must be where I want it, and there are, oh, so many new blooms I want to try. Mayn't I, Robert? It's all I yearn to do, to make the most beautiful garden in England.

ROBERT. That will be awkward. MacDonald is competent and he has been at Wallington since my father died.

ZITA. You are so clever. If you think it over I know you will find a way. (She touches the flowers on the table.) The French arrange flowers well, don't you think?

ROBERT. I've never noticed.

ZITA. But Robert, you've not told me when I shall begin to sit. I suppose it will be weeks hence.

ROBERT. (Very calmly.) Not at all. You begin this morning.

ZITA. (Drops her cup.) Today! But I' -- ! Where does one go? What do I --

ROBERT. Amelia will drive you to the studio every morning at ten, then call for you at twelve. It's all very simple. You know you really have nothing to do here, so I arranged the hour at Bertrand's and Amelia's convenience. You don't object? You know Amelia likes to have a finger in every pie.

ZITA. Oh, no -- I -- only, -- oh, no, of course, I don't object.

ROBERT. Bertrand tells me frankly he is a slow workman. That sometimes even after six weeks he throws away everything he has done, and starts all over again. I told him not to hurry. He will select the size canvas he thinks best. Personally, I hope he doesn't crowd it.

ZITA. (Half thinking aloud.) Shall it be with a hat? Yes, I think I shall wear the bonnet that ties under my chin with a black ribbon. I think it is a great mistake to be afraid of fashion in a portrait. Besides, the coiffure always betrays the date.

ROBERT. Better ask Bertrand. Leave these matters to his judgment.

ZITA. (A little dashed.) Perhaps I should. -- Mama would be pleased to know of this. She always felt that to be painted meant one had arrived. But certainly I have not arrived at anything. I wonder what precisely she meant.

ROBERT. An old-fashioned idea, like sending you to a convent.

ZITA. It all seems now as if the convent and mama belong to

another world. Sometimes I can hardly remember what mama looks like.

ROBERT. When we return to Wallington you should bring her on for a long visit. By then she will be tired enough of Italian pensions.

ZITA. Poor mama. I was a millstone around her neck.

ROBERT. You exaggerate. All mothers want their daughters to marry. It's natural. Now, my dear, I must be off. (Rises.) By the way, Sutton and I are dining at the St. James Club tonight. Jolly spot. One can always count on meeting all the Englishmen in Paris there in a week's time. (Henriette hands him his hat and stick.) Thanks, Henriette. -- Probably I shall be late. Don't wait up.

ZITA. (Evenly.) Very well, Robert.

(She goes with him to the door. He kisses her dutifully and pats her cheek.)

ROBERT. Be sure to be ready for Amelia at a quarter to ten.

ZITA. Yes, Robert. Goodbye.

(Robert goes out. Henriette, who has been performing the usual duties of table service, now proceeds to clear away. Zita stands in deep thought for a moment, looking after Robert. Then swiftly she turns and goes into her bedroom. She returns shortly with a housekeeping ledger under her arm, a pen and a bottle of ink. These she lays on the table, placing the bowl of flowers directly before her opened pages.)

ZITA. Are you ready now, Henriette?

HENRIETTE. Bien sûr, madame. I have in the pocket the list of yesterday. Madame will see?

ZITA. The mutton was excellent, Henriette. (Reads list.) You don't mean it cost five francs less? You are a magician.

(She enters the item in her book.)

HENRIETTE. I am much distress' -- and Joseph will be très embarrassé -- la petite substitution pour M. Harmer. Monsieur était très vexé.

ZITA. Yes, you see the English breakfast is pretty well stabilized, Henriette, like the rate of exchange. Only wars and rumors of wars can upset it. Perhaps it will be best, after all, to have the kidneys.

HENRIETTE. Oui, madame, je vous assure --

ZITA. Oh, dear, a blot already. Lady Emily would be so annoyed at me.

HENRIETTE. Comment?

ZITA. Oh, she was my neighbor and mentor at Wallington. She always inspected my needlework and my ledgers. Sometimes she insisted on seeing the bedrooms and the cellars. She would even make me play duets with her on the pianoforte. In spite of all that, I miss Lady Emily.

HENRIETTE. (Warmly.) Madame is ver' lonely -- oui. But madame has not need of advice. Madame is la parfait -- what you say? -- housekeeper.

ZITA. Always by your virtues, Henriette. (Copying from the list.) By the way, why do the French always make the 7 with the little extra stroke?

HENRIETTE. Oh, non, non, non, madame! It is les Anglais who forget the stroke! (They laugh. Zita finishes her bookkeeping.)

ZITA. And now, Henriette, have you the menus for today?

HENRIETTE. Les voici, madame. (She hands Zita another paper.)

ZITA. Better lay déjeuner for two. Perhaps Mrs. Legge will return with me.

HENRIETTE. Très bien.

ZITA. This seems just right for luncheon. Mrs. Legge is very fond of that glace de menthe Joseph makes so well. Shall we add it? (She scribbles the memo.) For dinner -- cancel all this. (She hands the paper back to Henriette.) Tell Joseph to make anything he wishes -- it doesn't matter -- only something very simple. I shall be -- alone.

HENRIETTE. (Sympathetically.) Ah, oui, -- alone. Joseph will make madame une petite surprise!

ZITA. Thanks, only tell him not to trouble. And did you deliver my message to the modiste?

HENRIETTE. She will expect madame at four tomorrow.

ZITA. (Rises.) Perhaps I should dress now. I am really so muddled I can't tell whether it is late or early.

HENRIETTE. Oh, it is yet ver' early. Is it that madame will have my help?

ZITA. No, thanks, Henriette. Perhaps I shall have time to write a letter before Amelia comes.

(Zita goes into her bedroom. Henriette continues her work of tidying the sitting room. She is just finished when a bell down stairs is heard to ring. Henriette goes out, and returns ushering in Amelia Legge and Madeleine Laurent. Amelia is a well turned out young Englishwoman, vivacious, practical, energetic. Madeleine is an older woman, the chic Parisienne of her day, handsome in an exotic fashion. She looks, and is, expensive.)

HENRIETTE. (Smiling, apologetic.) Entrez, s'il vous plaît, mesdames. I regret, Madame Harmer is not finish la toilette. She

was not expect' you until another hour, vous comprenez.

AMELIA. Please tell her I have come early because I have brought my dear friend, Madame Laurent, who wishes to meet her. Shall we wait here?

HENRIETTE. Ah, oui, certainement. Asseyez-vous, s'il vous plaît, mesdames. I will assist Madame Harmer. Please to wait un petit peu.

AMELIA. Oh, tell her not to hurry, Henriette. We have plenty of time.

HENRIETTE. Merci, madame. Excusez-moi. (She knocks on Zita's door and goes within.)

MADELEINE. (Speaking in a low tone.) Your protegée chooses competent domestics.

AMELIA. (Also in guarded tones.) Another instance of Cousin Robert's efficiency. He always engages the servants. Henriette is a sort of duenna as well as housekeeper.

MADELEINE. Is Zita so young?

AMELIA. Twenty-seven. I suppose that seems very young to Robert, who's fifty at least. Dear Zita is not the soul of punctuality, Madeleine. We may as well make ourselves comfortable for a long wait.

(Amelia and Madeleine sit on the sofa, continuing their confidential chat.)

MADELEINE. I shall be glad to catch my breath. Really, Amelia, you English are very sudden. I am just returned from Switzerland, you swoop down upon me and take me by main force -- to call on a relative. Yes, I understand she is a beauty, and Bertrand is to paint her; but what has it to do with me?

AMELIA. My dear Madeleine, in all the years I have been coming to you for advice, I have never needed your help so much as now. You must help me out with Zita.

MADELEINE. But you haven't told me -- what is to be done? Besides I know so little about Englishwomen.

AMELIA. She's not really English. Her mother is a South American. Her father, who is dead, was half Irish, a rake and an adventurer. Of course, she's classed as English, but any classification of Zita wouldn't be quite true.

MADELEINE. What do you mean by that?

AMELIA. Oh, I don't know -- she's indefinable. I simply can't make up my mind about her.

MADELEINE. (Laughing.) But why is it necessary to make up your mind, ma chèrie?

AMELIA. (Whispering.) Because everything is so wrong, and something must be done!

MADELEINE. Wrong! I must say, everything seems to be most right. Madame Harmer is the wife of a well-to-do English banker. She is mistress of a splendid country home in England, and a charming, comfortable apartment in Paris. She is very beautiful. Her husband does not beat her. She is to be painted by Bertrand. What is wrong?

AMELIA. To begin with, she and Robert live in different worlds.

MADELEINE. So do most husbands and wives, we French find. What's he like?

AMELIA. A fine fellow. I've known him all my life, better

than one usually knows cousins. I like Robert immensely, and I admire him. He is remarkable in business. Then, you see, being a north country man, he is fond of outdoor life and sports, horses and racing. But all the artistic side of life -- art, music, literature, painting -- is a sealed book to him.

MADELEINE. And she?

AMELIA. No one could be more different. She was brought up in a convent. She's a Catholic, you know.

MADELEINE. Does Robert object?

AMELIA. No, he says it doesn't matter what a woman's religion is. (They both laugh.) When the father died, she and her mother lived in pensions at Cannes, Nice, anywhere. She was in love with a handsome ne'er-do-well, who jilted her flatly, and she married Robert on the rebound. Then picture her life since marriage. They have been living in Wallington -- a splendid English country home, you imagine it. In reality, a gloomy, dismal, dreadful place -- a regular Bleak House. There was almost no society for her.

MADELEINE. Any children?

AMELIA. One. It hardly lived to be christened. So, though I can't yet make out what Zita is really like, nor what she thinks, I'm certain of one thing--there's not one idea in common between her and her husband!

MADELEINE. But that is so usual, my dear Amelia. She must learn to live her own life, outside of him.

AMELIA. Ah, but that is the trouble, and here is where you must help me. Can you believe me -- the child has been in Paris four months, and until I returned two weeks ago, she had been no-

where! She knows no one! She lives like a hermit!

MADELEINE. But that could easily be remedied -- your acquaintances through the Embassy --

AMELIA. Robert does not encourage it. He is not at ease with French people, he is very shy with foreigners. He will not even accompany her to the Embassy affairs -- I admit they're dull -- says he's too busy at the bank. I catechised Zita yesterday and learned that since they have been in Paris, Robert has taken her once to the Opera, and fell asleep during that. He never asks anyone to the house except his business friends, who smoke cigars and talk about the Stock Exchange!

MADELEINE. Is the man stupid?

AMELIA. Not at all -- very shrewd. (Hesitates.) Of course, there is a great deal of gossip about Mrs. Rylands.

MADELEINE. Ah, indeed! (Pause.) How long have Robert and Zita been married?

AMELIA. Seven years.

MADELEINE. Is this his first affair?

AMELIA. Apparently the only one. It has been in the background for some time. He has been seen at the races with her a great deal. He is trustee of her estate, which of course explains their many business conferences.

MADELEINE. Unfortunate. Nothing like a common financial interest to hold a man and woman together. That's why French marriages are well nigh indissoluble. What sort of person is she?

AMELIA. An American, widow of a business friend in London. As soon as it was announced that Robert was to be in Paris for

several years, Mrs. Rylands came over and settled, too — to educate her niece! She is most discreet, and always has very plausible reasons for everything.

MADELEINE. Does Zita know?

AMELIA. One can't really tell.

MADELEINE. But she is acquainted with Mrs. Rylands?

AMELIA. Oh, yes, and always most charming to her. She even invited Mrs. Rylands to their shooting lodge in the north of Scotland last October. Robert goes up there every year, with Wilfred Sutton and his wife, and now apparently Mrs. Rylands is to be of the party in the future. I call that a shame.

MADELEINE. Does Zita seem unhappy?

AMELIA. Neither happy nor unhappy. Listless, as if in a spell. She looks like a flower pinimg for want of sunlight.

MADELEINE. (Laughing.) Perhaps she is a Sleeping Beauty in the Wood?

AMELIA. Don't laugh at me. I'm sure of only one thing about Zita.

MADELEINE. What is that?

AMELIA. That whatever we guess about her will be wrong.

MADELEINE. Is she so deep?

AMELIA. You'll see. She does something to one. She's -- celestial. It's like listening to a tune played on muted strings. And yet, she's so simple, and naïve, and perfectly unaware that she's different.

MADELEINE. But my dear, what precisely am I to do?

AMELIA. You must insist on her coming to your house. You

know so many interesting people, French people.

MADELEINE. Tomorrow is my jour. Why not bring her yourself to make sure Robert will not dissuade her?

(Henriette enters.)

HENRIETTE. Madame Harmer is ver' sorry you wait so long. She come now, toute de suite.

AMELIA. Thank you, Henriette. (Henriette goes out.) Heavens, it is later than I thought. We shall not have long to chat. I suppose it would be unforgivable to be late for our first appointment.

(Zita enters. She wears a lilac muslin dress and a straw bonnet tied under her chin with black ribbons. Amelia goes to her.)

ZITA. Amelia! (They kiss.) Have you been a partner in this conspiracy with M. Bertrand?

AMELIA. Darling, Cyril and Robert have been absolute villains in their plotting. Such secrecy! I only knew last night when Cyril wrote his letter. I have hardly slept! (She turns to Madeleine.) Zita, this is my dear friend, Madeleine Laurent. I have been wanting you two to meet. Madeleine is the cleverest woman in Paris. She knows everyone. Her jours are famous.

MADELEINE. My dear Madame Harmer, of course you know your cousin well enough to pay no attention to her little fables.

AMELIA. But she does know everyone! In fact, she knows Bertrand and his family well. So I asked her to come along with us and break the ice at this first sitting. You don't mind?

ZITA. How kind of you both! It makes me feel so different about going. When I first thought I had to go alone, I was

wretched -- frightened, you know.

MADELEINE. You need not fear you will be disappointed by having your portrait turn out badly. Bertrand is a fine artist. He catches the esprit. Portraits can be so dreadful -- you must see the one Jules Vallières did of me! He gave me the most peculiar leer!

ZITA. This is all my husband's idea.

AMELIA. But don't you want it done?

ZITA. (Shrugs lightly.) It doesn't matter greatly. But it will give me something to do.

MADELEINE. Do you like Paris, madame?

ZITA. Oh, I love it! I feel enchantment here, the lights, the glamour, the beauty. (Apologetically.) I've been shut up in the country so long, you know. Now, it's as if I were in a dream and I can hear voices calling me to wake up.

MADELEINE. You enjoy music, of course?

ZITA. Oh, yes. Henriette goes with me sometimes to hear the concerts, and sometimes she goes with me to the picture galleries.

MADELEINE. I have just asked Amèlie to bring you tomorrow to my house. I never have many people. Only half a dozen or so. We talk, that's all.

AMELIA. You'll come, Zita?

ZITA. I should love to.

AMELIA. Will Jean de Bosis be there tomorrow, Madeleine?

MADELEINE. He has been visiting his mother in the country, but I believe he has returned.

AMELIA. Is he in love now?

MADELEINE. I don't know. If he's not, he soon will be again. When he's not, he wears a sign, "Coeur à louer", and it's never vacant long. (They all laugh.)

AMELIA. (To Zita.) Jean is a writer. At least, he's not published his book yet, but we expect it shortly.

ZITA. What does he write?

MADELEINE. Poems, he says. But he's very unlike poets. He seldom talks about his writing, and he never, never reads his manuscripts. By the way, Amèlie, you know he's a brother-in-law of Bertrand?

AMELIA. No! How fascinating! -- Do tell us, who will the others be?

MADELEINE. The Comtesse de Kermèno -- have you met her? She is absolutely inutile, but her chic amounts to art. The men sit at her feet.

AMELIA. And what about Walter Price?

MADELEINE. Oh, yes. He may drop in. (To Zita.) He's a workaday journalist. An Englishman who has lived in the States so long it's hard to tell which side of the water he belongs on. He's here and there and everywhere, on business, you know. So I rarely see him. But when he's in town he always remembers to come.

ZITA. I shall not be very interesting to these clever people, madame.

MADELEINE. (To Amelia, laughing.) Shall I tell the little cousin how delightful she is?

AMELIA. I told you you would like Zita!

ZITA. (Impulsively gives a hand to each.) Oh, you two make me feel as if I were just being born. This is such a brand-new, beautiful world. (To Madeleine.) I'm sure, madame, it's quite impossible for you to know how I shall look forward to tomorrow.

AMELIA. Tell me, Zita. Is this charming bonnet Robert's choice for the painting?

ZITA. No, mine. But perhaps Bertrand will not approve being painted in a bonnet?

AMELIA. Who can tell? Artists are such riddles. (A clock chimes three quarters.) Oh, we must start at once. My carriage is waiting. Madeleine, you dare not desert us. Come along.

MADELEINE. How hot it is! But Bertrand's studio is heavenly cool. It will be like plunging under a fountain. (They move to the door.)

ZITA. I have always wanted to plunge into a cool, green sea.

MADELEINE. The fountain better suits your style, ma chèrie. You are more nymph than mermaid. And besides, it's safer.

ZITA. Ah, that's the trouble! If I plunge, I want to go to the depths!

(The three go out laughing.)

CURTAIN

ACT I

Scene 2

(Two weeks later. The studio of Maurice Bertrand. Bertrand's studio is a strictly business-like room, with the usual north window. Several paintings, some finished, others in varying degrees of completion, hang on the walls, or stand on easels. Bertrand himself is a serious man, about thirty-five, who has the calm self-assurance of one who has achieved recognition and some prosperity. One might take him for a successful business man rather than an artist. He is utterly unaffected. Bertrand is in the act of arranging his brushes and paints, and an easel, on which is an unfinished canvas. He is obviously expecting a client. After setting things to his satisfaction, he walks about restlessly, smokes briefly.

(Jean de Bosis is sprawled on a chair. He is handsome, intense, eager, yet with a certain gentleness in his air. Between the two men there seems to run a deep current of sympathy and friendship.)

JEAN. But what is an Englishwoman doing in Paris in July?

BERTRAND. She is living here. Her husband has been transferred from a London bank to the Paris branch. They stay here all summer and take their holiday in autumn. He is very fond of shooting, so they go to Scotland every October.

JEAN. I've met her everywhere in the past two weeks. Only casually, of course. But I should never have thought her fond of sport.

BERTRAND. Not at all. It is her husband's amusement.

JEAN. What amuses her?

BERTRAND. I can't tell.

JEAN. Don't you talk while she sits?

BERTRAND. Oh, yes. At first she was very reticent, but now she ripples along like a brook.

JEAN. Are you annoyed to have me come today?

BERTRAND. Not I. But what about her?

JEAN. I asked her permission.

BERTRAND. What did she say?

JEAN. Neither yes nor no. So naturally I came.

BERTRAND. Whether you stay or not will depend upon how you affect her.

JEAN. What do you mean?

BERTRAND. I can't run the risk of your making her still more aloof. I am at my wits' end. She is almost unpaintable. I was astounded when I first saw her.

JEAN. Why?

BERTRAND. Well, I knew she was supposed to be good-looking, but I expected something large, obvious and British -- a full-blown Romney. Never this inscrutable loveliness.

JEAN. Strange. I do not consider her beautiful.

BERTRAND. She has an impalpable quality that is outside beauty and beyond it. I cannot catch it.

JEAN. What is beauty? I have wondered a million times at the mystery of it.

BERTRAND. She has none of the things that make for beauty, in a high enough degree to account for the whole effect. Soft eyes, yes. A well cut face, a good line, a charming expression. That is all. And yet, one looks at her spellbound.

JEAN. Yes, even I felt that. At Madeleine's yesterday I could not take my eyes off her.

BERTRAND. She has nothing marvelous, no obvious perfection,

but something emanates from her texture, line, movement, expression -- like a phrase of music, or the light on a cloud, or the sudden scent of hyacinth. There is something in her beyond the accidents of bone, flesh, shape, color. And it is that something that escapes me.

JEAN. (Rises.) May I see what you have done?

BERTRAND. (Follows him to the easel.) She came in that morning looking like a branch of lilac on a day when there is no sun. If she were only in sunlight I felt she would be superb. So you see I am painting her in dazzling sunshine. To me she is like something dazzling that is for the moment undergoing a soft eclipse.

JEAN. (Softly.) Art is the only justice. This is what she deserves -- to be brought into the light. How right you are. And you have kept that delicacy.

BERTRAND. But I have not captured her inner essence. The more I talk with her the less I feel I know her.

JEAN. I think that is because she is so young and inexperienced.

BERTRAND. But do you not sometimes feel that she is very old for her age? Disillusioned? That her face is a mask?

JEAN. To me she seems to have great possibilities of gaiety.

BERTRAND. All locked up in a box.

JEAN. Boxes have been opened.

BERTRAND. You should know. You are supposed to be an expert in forcing locks. Which reminds me, how is Marie?

JEAN. Ugh! Don't speak of her. She is too flat. She has a flat bosom and a flat mind. An unforgivable combination.

BERTRAND. But I thought you were in love at last?

JEAN. I have discovered, my dear Bertrand, that I am not made for love. Women are monotonous creatures. You know one, you know all. I can't endure their jealousies, their tirades. Even their coquetries -- I know them all by heart.

BERTRAND. The poet turns celibate!

JEAN. It is silly to believe that a poet must keep his head continually in some woman's lap. In the future, I shall keep mine in the clouds.

BERTRAND. Then I am afraid your poetry will be empty and windy.

JEAN. Seriously, do you believe I need women in my career?

BERTRAND. One woman, yes.

JEAN. You are a romanticist!

BERTRAND. And you, mon vieux, are at the parting of the ways. One moment you are intoxicated by beauty, the next you turn to sordid realism. Your writing betrays this.

JEAN. I am flattered. I did not know you ever read my effusions.

BERTRAND. How about your books?

JEAN. Not progressing well. Frankly, I am completely discouraged. I have lost faith in myself.

BERTRAND. The beginning of wisdom.

JEAN. The beginning of despair.

BERTRAND. The same thing. (A church clock nearby strikes ten.)

JEAN. Your Englishwoman is late.

BERTRAND. Always. Now she no longer even apologizes.

JEAN. Have you met her husband?

BERTRAND. Oh, yes. He came here once.

JEAN. He loves his wife?

BERTRAND. He would be capable of being jealous -- he wouldn't be easy.

JEAN. I am warned.

BERTRAND. Just as well to be careful. These English, you know.

JEAN. I've only talked with her in crowds. Madeleine is quite taken with her, and has introduced her in all quarters. She promises to be quite the rage.

BERTRAND. What do people say of her?

JEAN. Well, she's English, you know, and they don't always understand her. But everyone feels her attraction.

BERTRAND. Too bad M. Harmer is so much occupied with business.

JEAN. And with a Mrs. Rylands.

BERTRAND. So it appears. -- Nevertheless, Jean, why run into trouble?

JEAN. My dear Bertrand, I have definitely left behind the stage of adolescent passions. Henceforth I am master of my emotions. Her charm for me is the fascination of an enigma, and that, as you will agree, is a purely intellectual pastime. Moreover, I am sure you will also agree that riddles cannot be solved in crowds. One needs a quiet corner -- like this -- for concentration.

BERTRAND. H'm. -- I think the enigma has arrived. I hear steps on the stairs.

(He opens the studio door which leads out upon the landing of the stairs. Zita is in the doorway.)

BERTRAND. Ah, madame, today you are twice welcome. Come in. Here is Jean de Bosis awaiting you as eagerly as myself.

ZITA. Jean de Bosis!

JEAN. Have you forgotten, madame, that yesterday you were unable to give me a clear idea of your portrait. It seemed necessary to come here in person for the answer to my questions.

ZITA. M. Bertrand is very severe. He may not let you stay.

JEAN. Ah, he dares not offend me. I should write a very nasty critique of his theories on modernism in art to the next Revue Blanche.

ZITA. I didn't know you were a contributor to the Revue Blanche.

BERTRAND. That is the sad truth.

ZITA. Why sad?

BERTRAND. Because if his stuff were really any good that magazine would refuse it. -- Wouldn't you like to rest, madame, before we begin?

ZITA. Oh, no, I'm not tired, or even warm. Shall I sit here as usual? (She arranges herself in the chair which has been placed for her.)

BERTRAND. (Beginning to mix his paints.) You two may talk as much as you like. Forgive me if I am rude today. I am in the middle of something very difficult, and I may become absorbed in what I am doing.

JEAN. (Seating himself near Zita.) What do you think of Paris in July, madame?

ZITA. I adore Paris.

JEAN. Personally, I like the summers here. One feels so much freer, when the city is supposed to be empty. It is just as full, really, only the five or six people you don't want to see are away, and that makes all the difference.

ZITA. That's just it.

JEAN. Do you miss England?

ZITA. Oh, no. I like the French people. They are so civil. They notice one exists.

JEAN. Don't tell me you escaped notice in England? (She nods.) The English must be very absent-minded.

ZITA. (Smiling.) You've been in England, of course?

JEAN. Never. I am totally uncivilized. Tell me about your home. Where do you live?

ZITA. My husband's home is Wallington --

JEAN. Then that is your home, too, isn't it?

ZITA. I suppose it is. I never thought of it before. It is in the country, quite a distance from London.

JEAN. But I thought your husband was in business in London?

ZITA. Oh, yes, he is. He goes up Mondays for the week and stays at his club.

JEAN. Oh. But you have society, of course?

ZITA. Oh, yes. There are neighbors. They come to dinner occasionally.

JEAN. Tell me about them.

ZITA. Lord and Lady St. Eustace. They are quite old, and live all by themselves in a house where Queen Elizabeth once slept. But they are never alone. The English make long visits, you know.

Often their house is full of guests. Every day luncheon is laid for fourteen.

JEAN. Splendid. Who else?

ZITA. Colonel Gallop and Lady Emily. He is a great deal younger than she. They have two children. One is paralyzed. Lady Emily takes an interest in me. Even when my husband is too busy to go himself, I sometimes go to shooting parties with them, or to cricket weeks.

JEAN. Don't you miss all that?

ZITA. Oh, no. It's really a bit tiresome. You see, in England one has to take sport very seriously.

JEAN. No other near friends?

ZITA. Only the Bishop of Easthampton. He is charming. But he is suspected of having leanings toward the Greek church.

JEAN. Shocking! And besides all this, what else does one do in England for amusement?

ZITA. Oh, I read novels.

JEAN. French or English?

ZITA. Both. Sometimes Russian, too. Do you like novels?

JEAN. I have read all the novels everyone has read. One has to do that once, then one need never do it again.

ZITA. I often wonder whether things in life ever happen as they do in a novel. Do you think they do?

JEAN. Life seems to me so badly constructed. As if the author were constantly forgetting what he had meant his characters to do.

ZITA. How do you mean?

JEAN. Well, a man and a woman are in love, let us say --

ZITA. Married?

JEAN. M'm, no. She has decided to give herself to him and is en route to the place of meeting. It rains and she calls a carriage. The driver mistakes the address. She misses the appointment. The rendezvous is postponed, the spell broken. Something is bungled, don't you see? A few drops of rain, a deaf cabby, and two human souls do not fulfill their highest destiny.

ZITA. But in your story was it the trivial incident of rain and a deaf cabby which kept them apart, or was it a lack of courage?

JEAN. Does it take courage, madame, to love?

ZITA. (Unsuspectingly.) I don't know. I've sometimes thought so.

(Jean looks at her searchingly. Their eyes meet. A long look.)

ZITA. (In a low tone.) Do you like my portrait?

JEAN. I must study the original before I can answer that.

ZITA. In a laboratory -- under a microscope?

JEAN. One approaches a star through the telescope.

ZITA. It must be very chilly being a star. I shouldn't like that.

JEAN. Then you must not be remote.

ZITA. People often change, don't you think?

JEAN. Every seven years, I have been told.

ZITA. Do you think I should change?

JEAN. I will tell you tomorrow.

ZITA. Tomorrow?

JEAN. I shall be here again while you sit.

ZITA. Oh, will M. Bertrand permit you?

JEAN. Positively. He wants to paint you smiling.

ZITA. And you are guaranteed to amuse?

JEAN. I am forbidden to be serious. We shall never talk about epidemics, or art, or your Mr. Carlyle and his Roman Empire.

ZITA. What shall we talk about?

JEAN. Ourselves. Life. Paris.

ZITA. Is all this true, M. Bertrand?

BERTRAND. It is true, madame, that you are difficult to paint. That is a painter's compliment.

ZITA. Don't I sit still enough?

BERTRAND. It is because every day you are different. No, not that. You have the faculty of making yourself invisible, of closing the petals. -- Nonsense. Perhaps it is merely that I don't know how to paint.

ZITA. Oh, it seems to me wonderfully done so far. Shall you be much longer?

BERTRAND. Indefinitely, at this rate.

(Jean's eyes seek Zita's. They smile.)

JEAN. (Looking over Bertrand's shoulder at the easel.) Yes, it's good, wonderfully good, Bertrand, but you are right. Il y a quelque chose qui manque --

BERTRAND. Don't annoy me. Go sit down. It won't be long now before Mrs. Legge will call for madame.

ZITA. Oh, not today. She was busy. My husband is coming. He is interested to see how the portrait is progressing.

BERTRAND. Naturally. But I am afraid he will not be pleased.

JEAN. Your husband must be fond of pictures, madame?

ZITA. He says he does not understand art.

JEAN. Then he does not understand women, either?

ZITA. I think he prefers horses.

JEAN. The races, of course?

ZITA. Yes. He always goes with Wilfred Sutton, his partner.

JEAN. What is your hobby, madame?

ZITA. I have none.

JEAN. But isn't there something you should like best in the world?

ZITA. You ask as if you intended to give it to me.

JEAN. Perhaps I shall.

ZITA. I should like a house on the Mediterranean in North Africa. Someone told me once it is the most beautiful country in the world and that its gardens are dreams of Paradise. I should like to live always in sunshine and among flowers. England is so cold, and it rains.

JEAN. Alone in this Eden, Eve?

ZITA. I suppose so. I have always felt alone.

JEAN. You have a family, of course?

ZITA. Only my mother. And I scarcely know her. I spent so many years in the convent.

JEAN. A convent! You are religious?

ZITA. I perform my duties. But I have never been able to feel deeply about them. Am I wicked?

JEAN. You are Eve in an Adamless garden. How could you be wicked?

ZITA. It is only in Paris, I think, that disapprobation does not exist. I adore Paris.

JEAN. Tomorrow afternoon, Cècile -- my sister, you know, Bertrand's wife -- and I and Bertrand are driving out to the Bois. Won't you join us and make a party? We'll have tea.

ZITA. What fun. But do you think I should?

JEAN. Of course. Cècile wants to meet you, too. You are becoming so in demand we must snatch you when we can.

ZITA. At what hour?

JEAN. We will call for you at three.

(A knock is heard on the studio door. Bertrand lays down his brush and opens the door to admit Mr. Harmer and a lady, large, smooth and blonde.)

ROBERT. Ah, good afternoon, M. Bertrand. Have I interrupted?

BERTRAND. Not at all. We were nearly finished for the day.

ROBERT. I have brought Mrs. Rylands to see the portrait, too, and tell me how she likes it. Caroline, may I present M. Bertrand?

BERTRAND. Charmed, madame. I shall value your opinion.

MRS. RYLANDS. I hope you won't think I'm intruding. (She sweeps forward to Zita.) Zita, my dear, how are you? I simply couldn't contain my curiosity any longer and begged Robert to let me see the painting. Do you mind?

ZITA. (Rises, smiling.) On the contrary. I think you are taking a great deal of trouble for me. Mrs. Rylands, M. Jean de Bosis. (Jean bows deeply.)

MRS. RYLANDS. <u>La Revue Blanche</u>? I have often read your writings.

JEAN. You are very kind, madame.

BERTRAND. M. Harmer, my brother-in-law.

ROBERT. Ah, how do you do?

MRS. RYLANDS. (To Zita.) Are you exhausted, my dear? This heat, and all. And Robert tells me you've been very gay lately. So glad you are enjoying Paris. And now, do let me see the portrait. Ah, Robert has found it. (She crosses up and joins Robert in studying the portrait.)

ROBERT. I say, capital, isn't it? Striking. And like, too, very like. Perfect resemblance. Shouldn't you say so, Caroline?

MRS. RYLANDS. I think it is splendid! Do you plan to hang this in your next exhibition, M. Bertrand?

BERTRAND. With M. Harmer's permission.

ROBERT. Why, certainly, if it suits you that well.

BERTRAND. I think it may, if I can finish it to my satisfaction. Today I have made better progress.

MRS. RYLANDS. Oh, isn't it nearly done?

BERTRAND. A good many details -- the background, you see, here and here. And the face is only begun.

MRS. RYLANDS. Really! Yes, of course, I see now. The mole on her cheek is not in yet, for example.

BERTRAND. (Turns the easel to the wall.) And now let's forget work for a glass of Madeira. Jean, will you find the decanter and the glasses in that cabinet?

(Jean goes to the cabinet and fills the wine glasses.)

ROBERT. (To Zita.) You know, Zita, I'm particularly glad to see the picture today for it happens I shan't have another chance right away. Probably it will be all done by the time I return

from London.

ZITA. I didn't know you were going. When?

ROBERT. Tomorrow. For a fortnight, probably. Would you like to stay with Cyril and Amelia?

ZITA. I think not. What train shall you take?

ROBERT. Three o'clock.

ZITA. (Looking at Jean.) I'll go to the station with you.

ROBERT. No, don't bother. I hate goodbyes at stations. I'd really rather you wouldn't.

ZITA. Very well. (She looks at Jean again.)

MRS. RYLANDS. Do you know, I shall have to go to London soon? I am having a great deal of trouble about leasing my house.

ZITA. Why don't you go with Robert tomorrow? It's such a dull trip to make alone.

MRS. RYLANDS. Perhaps I could be ready -- if Robert doesn't object?

ROBERT. Come, by all means, if you can.

MRS. RYLANDS. Can I do any errands for you in London, Zita?

ZITA. Thank you, no. I think I can find everything I need in Paris.

MRS. RYLANDS. Yes, you are learning your way about very fast. -- Tell me, M. Bertrand, do you think it is the function of art to idealize?

BERTRAND. To discover, one might say. Art is the world's spectacles.

MRS. RYLANDS. Lovely! No wonder your paintings are so original. But now I must be going. My dear Zita, my carriage is

waiting down in the street. Do let me drop you at your apartment.

ROBERT. Yes, Zita. That will be very accommodating, don't you think?

ZITA. Thank you very much. -- Until tomorrow, M. Bertrand. Goodbye, M. de Bosis.

BERTRAND. Au 'voir, madame. Thank you for coming, Mrs. Rylands. Bon voyage, M. Harmer.

(Jean bows silently to all. As Zita goes last out the door she glances over her shoulder at him. He quickly holds up three fingers in a gesture of gay conspiracy.)

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene 1

(The Harmer apartment, May, 1880. The scene is a quiet alcove adjoining Zita Harmer's drawing room. Zita has now begun to hold her own jour. Through the open archway can be heard laughter, conversation, faint music. The occasion is obviously a huge affair. Enter Bertrand and Madeleine.)

BERTRAND. I am suffocated. Let's get out of that crush. Why does half of Paris try to stuff itself into this apartment every week?

MADELEINE. It's all your fault, Bertrand. You have no right to complain.

BERTRAND. I! I have nothing to do with it!

MADELEINE. You made Zita Harmer famous.

BERTRAND. On the contrary, Zita Harmer has perhaps made me famous. What a piece of luck that first painting was hung the year of the Exhibition. So many foreigners -- English especially -- were in Paris that year.

MADELEINE. I shall never forget her in that lilac dress, in the brilliant sunshine.

BERTRAND. Ah, but my second painting of her will be my masterpiece. You knew I asked M. Harmer's permission to paint her again? I put her in yellow satin, with a tea rose near her heart.

MADELEINE. Tell me, does Jean de Bosis still come to her sittings?

BERTRAND. Oh, regularly. I could not have painted it without him. He seems to have the faculty of releasing her from some inner

prison.

MADELEINE. And what effect has she on Jean?

BERTRAND. Ah! I have been wondering about that.

(Enter Amelia. She carries a book in her hand and is obviously very much excited.)

AMELIA. Madeleine, I have been looking everywhere for you! And M. Bertrand, I wanted to find you, too.

MADELEINE. What's the matter?

AMELIA. It's about Jean's book. Have you seen it, M.Bertrand?

BERTRAND. No. I knew it was about to be published.

AMELIA. Here it is! I can't imagine what will be the outcome now!

MADELEINE. What do you mean?

AMELIA. My dear, these poems are -- well, Robert simply cannot ignore these!

BERTRAND. (With grave concern.) Madame, may I see them? (She hands him the volume.)

AMELIA. And fancy! This was lying on a table in the drawing room. Zita has apparently not read all of them. Some of the pages are still uncut.

BERTRAND. (Reads the inscription.) "A Madame Harmer, avec les plus respectueux hommages de Jean de Bosis." Harmless enough.

AMELIA. Yes, but read this! (She finds a page.)

(Bertrand reads silently. It is apparent he is deeply shocked. Amelia hands the book to Madeleine, who reads the indicated portion and returns the volume to Bertrand. An eloquent silence, while the three look at each other questioningly.)

MADELEINE. But this may mean nothing at all, so far as Zita is concerned.

AMELIA. Perhaps not. But you can't deny Jean and Zita have been talked about lately. I am dreadfully worried over what Robert will do.

MADELEINE. He may never see this book. He doesn't read French, does he?

AMELIA. The fox. He understands it perfectly well. He merely doesn't care to bother, because he wants everyone to agree that English is a superior tongue.

BERTRAND. These all seem to be pretty fervid.

AMELIA. The poor boy has thrown his heart wide open.

MADELEINE. Will Robert be frightfully jealous?

AMELIA. Not jealous. But worse. He will be scandalized if any publicity results from this.

MADELEINE. How can it? Poetic passions cannot be proved to refer to Zita or to anyone else.

AMELIA. Granting there may be some argument there, can't you see what the implication will be, with the book coming out just at this time? All the veiled hints will break out into the open. There will be a wildfire of gossip. It will be awkward for Cyril, too. You know how the Embassy will view such a situation.

BERTRAND. Perhaps I had better talk to Jean. (Bertrand returns the book to Amelia.) There must be some answer, and it may be just as well to find out what it is -- in case any questions are asked. Don't worry, Mrs. Legge. I'm sure your cousin will not be affected by this -- indiscreet -- volume. I think I saw Jean come in a few minutes ago. If you will kindly excuse me -- (He bows, and leaves the room.)

AMELIA. This is such a shock to me, for I had actually begun to think we were mistaken about Jean and Zita.

MADELEINE. Why?

AMELIA. Because he no longer talked about her. At first, every time he was with us he used to discuss her continually. She seemed to quite possess his thoughts. Now he rarely mentions her.

MADELEINE. He looks much changed lately. Like a man who has had a bad illness. Whatever their relations may have been, I believe things are different now.

AMELIA. You think, then, Zita has refused him?

MADELEINE. She is an icicle.

AMELIA. You know, I don't believe she was ever in love with Robert.

MADELEINE. Of course not.

AMELIA. Oh, dear, all this dreadful uncertainty is what comes of Zita's not confiding the true state of affairs to someone. Now when I was falling in love with Cyril, I told dozens of my friends in confidence and asked their advice.

MADELEINE. I cannot imagine Zita confiding. It is not that she wishes to keep her affairs secret. I think she has been alone so much she does not know how to open her innermost thoughts to others.

AMELIA. But was there an affair? Is there an affair? That's what I can't determine, in spite of the book. They are seen everywhere together, but never alone. Always with friends and acquaintances.

MADELEINE. Zita is probably as much a mystery to herself as

she is to the world.

AMELIA. Then it must be the world loves a mystery. Look how she has been taken up this winter. And all due to your kindness.

MADELEINE. My dear, never believe that it was kindness on my part to sponsor Zita Harmer. Can't you see that launching a beautiful unknown was the smartest thing I could possibly have done that season?

(Enter Robert Harmer.)

ROBERT. I beg your pardon. -- Oh, it's you, Amelia. How do you do, Mme. Laurent? I'm looking for Zita.

AMELIA. (Flurried, concealing the book behind her in the chair.) Oh, Robert, what a surprise! You don't usually leave the bank so early, do you? The last I saw of Zita she was talking to Lady Lawless. You know Hedworth Lawless. They've been staying in Paris this winter. He's such a charmer. The women are all mad about him --

ROBERT. Yes, of course. I'll look for her again. I was a bit surprised to find so many people. Has it been like this every Thursday?

AMELIA. Oh, far worse some days, Robert. You don't realize your wife is the talk of Paris -- (She breaks off, confused.)

ROBERT. I'm beginning to. (He turns to leave.)

AMELIA. Oh, Robert, I have no doubt Cyril has quite forgotten we are dining tonight with the minister from Russia. If you can find him, will you send him to me here?

ROBERT. Yes, of course. (He goes out.)

AMELIA. My dear, something is wrong! Robert abhors crowds,

you know. Why has he come here now?

MADELEINE. You mustn't be so nervous, Amelia. Zita is apparently utterly calm and unconcerned.

AMELIA. Do you know, I think Zita is unperceptive. She is not stupid -- she does not lack imagination -- but she is unperceptive.

MADELEINE. Any Frenchwoman could have told you that. But how did you discover it?

AMELIA. She was talking about Lady Lawless the other day, and said she supposed that Lady Lawless was too sensible to be jealous of all her husband's admirers -- that she doubtless saw safety in numbers. Now, one needs to be with Lady Lawless only half an hour to discover that she is violently jealous of every woman on earth. She would be jealous even if she stopped loving Hedworth. She's the sort that would have the toothache even if she had lost all her teeth.

MADELEINE. Yes, I agree with you. Zita is unperceptive. Perhaps that is her defense against life.

AMELIA. Or is it her fatal weakness? She may run into some terrible danger, simply because she does not perceive it.

(Walter Price appears in the doorway. He is about twenty-five. At first glance one is likely to think him a bit fox-faced, but this impression soon wears away under the ingenuous friendliness of his manner. He is a news-gatherer of a highly specialized sort. Perhaps his friendliness is derivative from the demands made upon him by his profession. He is strikingly good looking. Although he speaks with an American accent, he does not seem to be an American.)

WALTER. Hello. I'm looking for Zita.

AMELIA. Everybody's looking for Zita. Won't we do?

WALTER. Say, she's marvelous, isn't she? Do you know what I've discovered in the two days since I've returned?

AMELIA. (Agitated.) No. What?

WALTER. That, next to Sarah Bernhardt, Zita Harmer is the most popular woman in Paris this winter. (Amelia sighs with relief.) Ever since her picture was hung, people have certainly raved over her.

MADELEINE. You have neglected me lately, Walter. What have you been doing?

WALTER. Oh, turning my hand to anything that comes along. Sport, the stage, political meetings, personages. Did you know I am now writing for an English paper as well as for my American ones?

MADELEINE. Is that a step up, or down, journalistically speaking?

WALTER. It's up, in that my "public", my "dear public", is much enlarged.

MADELEINE. Do you have to handle them differently, your American and your English publics?

WALTER. Bless you, no. The good old American technique works just as well on both sides the big pond. You can't escape the fact that human nature loves sensation. Most lives are so infernally dull, and people have to have a vicarious outlet for their romantic or adventurous longings.

MADELEINE. You must be able to find plenty to satisfy them in your wanderings.

WALTER. All twopenny stuff. Of course, like every other

reporter who has been educated in New York, I dream of making the scoop of the century.

AMELIA. Is it true you are going to London to live? Cyril told me there are rumors.

WALTER. Yes, my London paper wants me there to watch the political situation that is developing between Gladstone and Parliament. In politics there should be enough scope to satisfy my craving for sensation. Plenty there to discover, and uncover.

AMELIA. You don't mean you deliberately look for scandal?

WALTER. Well, if it comes my way, I don't try to escape.

AMELIA. But suppose it were about one of your friends?

WALTER. Don't you see that my friends must be like Caesar's wife?

AMELIA. (Persisting.) Otherwise you would betray them?

WALTER. A good newspaperman never betrays a confidence, my dear Mrs. Legge. Your indiscretions will be quite safe in my keeping, if you tell me them yourself.

AMELIA. (Looks at Madeleine.) We must tell him ourselves, Madeleine, do you see?

WALTER. Tell me what?

MADELEINE. (Hastily.) Unfortunately, Walter, our lives are utterly uneventful. Amelia merely likes to know how such things are managed. That's what you meant, isn't it, dear?

AMELIA. Yes, that's it. (Rises.) I really must go after Cyril. I felt Robert would forget to speak to him. If we are late to that dinner, the Russians will build another warship. -- I'll call for you tomorrow, Madeleine darling, at four. You'll

excuse me, Mr. Price?

(Amelia goes out. Walter notices the book in her chair, picks it up and starts after her.)

WALTER. Oh, Mrs. Legge, is this your book?

MADELEINE. (Interrupting.) No, Walter -- that is -- the book is not Amelia's. May I take it, please? I know where it belongs.

WALTER. (Reads.) "A Madame Harmer, avec les plus respectueux hommages de Jean de Bosis." -- Say, it's a book of poems. I love poetry. I'd like to read this.

MADELEINE. It's Zita's book, and she hasn't cut all the leaves yet. So you can't really, can you, Walter?

WALTER. No, I suppose not. (He hands her the book which she places on a table.) May I see you home, Madeleine? Things seem to be thinning out here. I want a good talk with you before I'm exiled to my native land. There's no one in England to take your place. You have been my guiding star, you know.

MADELEINE. (Laughing.) Isn't there a girl back there in England?

WALTER. Oh, she threw me over -- fortunately. Now that I've learned what a woman like you can mean, all that schoolgirl stuff seems pretty insipid.

MADELEINE. Same old flatterer! Let's go, shall we?

(Madeleine and Walter go out. A moment's pause and Zita enters, followed by Robert. She is radiant, glowing, tender. As Bertrand put it, "released from an inner prison".)

ROBERT. Look here, Zita, it's getting pretty difficult to have a word with you.

ZITA. I'm sorry, Robert. I had to wait until everyone had gone. It was a bit of a crowd today.

ROBERT. I don't mean that, merely. You're always out nowadays. I've wanted a talk with you for some time.

ZITA. Let's sit down, Robert, shall we? (She relaxes on the sofa. Robert sits stiffly by the table.) Did you meet Walter Price? He's an Englishman, you know. The journalist.

ROBERT. Yes, I found him a welcome contrast to all these gabbling Frenchmen.

ZITA. Do you really dislike the French so much, Robert?

ROBERT. So much so that I have decided not to try to live among them any longer.

ZITA. (Very slowly.) What do you mean?

ROBERT. For some time I have been trying to decide whether I should accept the offer of directorship of the home office. Today I decided. We return to England.

ZITA. We are going to leave Paris?

ROBERT. Naturally. That is what I am telling you.

ZITA. We shall come back some day?

ROBERT. Never, if I can help it.

ZITA. What makes you do this, Robert?

ROBERT. It seems best, all things considered.

ZITA. Best? I don't understand. To me, it will be --

ROBERT. To both of us it will be a return to the sane, English way of life. We shall re-open Wallington, of course.

ZITA. (Shudders.) Wallington! I had forgotten about Wallington.

ROBERT. Why so appalled? Where else should we go?

ZITA. There is nowhere else to go.

ROBERT. You always used to be happy there, I thought.

ZITA. (Rises and walks about the room.) You thought! You never thought, Robert, whether I was happy or wretched. So long as I made no inconvenient disturbance of your habits.

ROBERT. You must admit I have made no inconvenient disturbance of your habits here in Paris. Even at the cost of becoming ticketed as merely the husband of a celebrity.

ZITA. I thought you took some pride in my being admired. I'm sure I had no wish to begin all this.

ROBERT. You are quite right, and since I am entirely responsible for the beginning I will also take responsibility for the ending.

ZITA. How arbitrary you are, Robert! Does it never occur to you that I may not wish an ending to the only happy life I have ever known?

ROBERT. You are confirming my opinions. When a married woman discovers her only happiness is at variance with her husband's interests, it is only a question of time until the domestics discover it, then her friends, then -- possibly -- who knows? -- the press. It is increasingly obvious to me that an end is what is needed here.

ZITA. What have I given you cause to fear?

ROBERT. My dear Zita, I am not afraid.

ZITA. Nothing touches you, does it, Robert? You always believe in your own omniscience. I have never realized until lately how English you are.

ROBERT. Perhaps I have never realized until lately how un-English you are. True, in England it is not considered -- good taste -- for a woman to be continually in the public eye. It -er- might lead to misunderstanding, even to -- talk. And that, I am sure you will appreciate, is something no husband can tolerate.

ZITA. It is nonsense to invent such bogies. And cruel to make me suffer for your inventions.

ROBERT. Please, Zita, let's not quarrel. You know, I have always tried to be good to you. When we are back in England, I have planned several things I'm sure you will like. One surprise, especially.

ZITA. (Covers her face with her hands.) I cannot go! I cannot!

ROBERT. Come, we must talk sensibly now and make our plans. I propose to go over to London tonight to start preparations for opening Wallington. I shall be gone about three days. Say until Monday night. That will give you time to pack, write your farewell notes. Then we will leave at once, and you shall stay in London with Aunt Elspeth for a holiday.

ZITA. Three days --

ROBERT. The boat train leaves in half an hour. Henriette has already packed for me. I'm sure you will feel better when I return. (He goes to Zita and takes her in his arms.) Goodbye, until Monday night.

ZITA. Until Monday night.

ROBERT. Don't forget to write everyone we know. And, by the way, better write M. de Bosis thanking him for his book of poems.

I see he has sent you a copy.

ZITA. (Quickly.) Have you read it?

ROBERT. Er -- in part. Caroline Rylands has a copy. (Zita stiffens slightly.) Very handsomely gotten up. These French have a flair for fine bindings.

ZITA. (Nervously.) I haven't read it yet.

ROBERT. As you know, I'm no judge of literature. -- Well, I must hurry if I am to make that train. Goodbye.

(Robert goes out. Zita stands as if stunned, then goes over to the table and picks up the book. She sinks into the chair and begins to read. As she reads, her face becomes that of a woman poring over the pages of an impassioned love letter. Henriette enters.)

HENRIETTE. Pardon, madame, M. de Bosis is return! He wishes to see madame -- très, très important, he ask me to say.

ZITA. (Springing up.) Jean de Bosis! Oh, no, Henriette, I can't see him now. -- Wait. After all, - yes, I must see him.

(She stands motionless, still clutching the book, as Henriette goes out. In a moment Jean enters and goes quickly to her. She extends a hand, which he clasps and holds hungrily.)

JEAN. Zita, is it true what Bertrand says, that I have offended you, disgraced you?

ZITA. You have not offended me. What does he mean?

JEAN. I had no idea things would happen like this. I can't imagine why I was such a stupid fool. Surely you know I would not hurt your dear self for the sake of a hundred books. I came at once to apologize and to offer you any restitution in my power.

ZITA. I'm afraid I don't understand --

JEAN. You are reading my book -- oh, my dear, to see you

holding it like this is almost like seeing my child in your arms. -- Forgive me! I am talking wildly. Bertrand has completely unnerved me.

ZITA. You must explain. I am still in the dark.

JEAN. Have you read my book?

ZITA. (Blushing.) Not all. I was reading it as you came in.

JEAN. What does it mean to you?

ZITA. (Faintly and lamely.) I think it is -- very beautiful.

JEAN. Don't you know that it is what I have wanted to tell you all these months? Don't you know you can't keep a man stifled and inarticulate forever? I worshipped you from the beginning. You knew that, didn't you? Why would you never let me speak? Long ago I should have broken through your reserve, I should have insisted, I should have kissed these hands long, long ago (he kisses them) - and this mouth. (Taking her in his arms.) But I was afraid of your mystery -- your spell. Now suddenly I know you are no mystery, but all woman. (He kisses her.) Why have you made me so unhappy?

ZITA. How could I have made you happy? You know it is all so impossible.

JEAN. I have suffered because you would not reveal yourself to me. I need you so, Zita. My whole life has grown about you.

ZITA. You need me?

JEAN. More than I can say. I was drifting, now life has direction. My work was futile and barren. Now I exult in the meaning and force and beauty of the thoughts that leap from my pen. Already I have planned my next book. I have genius, Zita, but I never knew it until it burst into flame under your touch. I need

you. You are my talisman.

ZITA. This should never have happened. I am much to blame.

JEAN. Darling if there is blame, it is that I ever allowed these poems to appear without your sanction. I did not realize, until Bertrand told me, there was any hint of rumor concerning us two. He was very severe with me, I don't mind telling you.

ZITA. Oh, now I understand! That is why everything is to come to an end.

JEAN. Come to an end! What do you mean?

ZITA. Jean, I have to tell you. My husband is returning to England at once. We are leaving Paris -- forever.

JEAN. Oh, no!

ZITA. So you see, it is all quite, quite hopeless. (Suddenly she breaks into sobs.) What is to become of me? I cannot go back! I cannot go back!

JEAN. Tell me, Zita -- let us sit here quietly and talk -- do you trust me?

ZITA. I suppose so.

JEAN. And you do love me a little?

ZITA. More than a little.

JEAN. Then why must you go back to England at all? You must know your husband's life is quite fully occupied already. Why must you sacrifice yourself for him? What will life mean to you? You belong here. Stay with me.

ZITA. Oh, Jean, you are mad --

JEAN. Yes, and may God keep me so -- mad with love of you. Listen. Remember you told me once you wanted to live always among

ACT II

Scene 2

(The same, three days later. A small group of intimate friends has been invited to an informal farewell supper at the Harmer apartment. Henriette shows in Mrs. Rylands.)

MRS. RYLANDS. I know I'm very early, Henriette. Dinner is at eight, isn't it? Please don't announce me yet to Mrs. Harmer. I'm really exhausted, and shall be glad to rest. -- Has Mr. Harmer returned from London?

HENRIETTE. Ah, oui, madame, since one hour. M. Harmer is finis dressing now. He is already downstair.

MRS. RYLANDS. Don't let me trouble anyone. I'll just wait here quietly till the others come.

HENRIETTE. Très bien, madame.

(Henriette goes out. Mrs. Rylands walks about the room softly, restlessly; picks up Jean's book, smiles, lays it down. Robert enters.)

ROBERT. Caroline!

MRS. RYLANDS. Oh, Robert, I was so afraid I shouldn't have a chance for a word with you before you leave tomorrow. This has been a great shock to me, your going so suddenly.

ROBERT. It distresses me, too, my dear. But of course it will be only temporary. You will return to London as soon as possible? Promise me that.

MRS. RYLANDS. It will take a little managing. I wish you had collaborated with me in advance. It's hard to maintain plausibility under all conditions, you know.

ROBERT. I'm sorry, Caroline. In this instance, I had to decide independently and move quickly.

MRS. RYLANDS. A crisis? I told you it would happen.

ROBERT. Let's not go into that. -- Look, I brought you a little trinket from London. Not a farewell gift, just an auf wiedersehen. Here, see if you like it. (He takes a bracelet from his pocket.)

MRS. RYLANDS. Oh, ravishing! Dare I wear it tonight?

(She holds out her hand to Robert, who clasps on the bracelet and kisses the hand.)

ROBERT. You are really entitled to this. I converted that stock of mine as you suggested, and a very pretty profit it made.

MRS. RYLANDS. We <u>are</u> lucky, aren't we?

ROBERT. I call it your cleverness and my luck. I've often wondered, Caroline, if I'd ever have been offered the London directorship if it were only my own financial sagacity I'd been using all these years.

MRS. RYLANDS. I won't hear you underrate yourself so, my dearest. Everyone knows you are a tower of strength in business. And you know how I trust you and admire you.

ROBERT. Upon my word, I can't quite see how I shall manage without you the next few months.

MRS. RYLANDS. It may be only a few weeks.

ROBERT. Please -- don't be hasty! After all, you must remember there is nothing more important than appearances.

MRS. RYLANDS. Trust me to know that by now. I'll be discreet, of course. Meantime, you'll write me -- and come over sometimes?

ROBERT. As I can. Probably I shan't see you again. We're

leaving early in the morning.

MRS. RYLANDS. I'm very jealous. To be left behind!

ROBERT. Darling, I count on you to understand -- and help.

(Enter Henriette, ushering in Madeleine Laurent and Walter Price.)

ROBERT. Madame, this is a pleasure. (To Walter.) Good evening, sir. You both know Mrs. Rylands, I am sure.

(Walter bows. The women greet warmly, and begin chatting.)

WALTER. You are what newspaper men call "good copy", Mr. Harmer.

ROBERT. Good copy?

WALTER. You make such unexpected moves. And, as you know, if it were not for the unexpected, newspapers might as well go out of business.

ROBERT. (A little pleased.) Quite so. I presume you're right. I am agreeably surprised, too, to learn that you have matched my move with one of your own. You are returning to London, also? Splendid. Mrs. Harmer and I will look forward to seeing a great deal of you in England.

WALTER. Ah. Thank you! This will reconcile me to leaving Paris.

MADELEINE. (To Mrs. Rylands.) Dear Zita. Paris will be quite dull without her. Amelia is heartbroken.

MRS. RYLANDS. Of course. It's such a pity.

(Amelia and Cyril are shown in.)

ROBERT. Cousin Amelia, how charming you look! Glad to see you, Cyril.

CYRIL. Thank you, sir. How did you find England?

AMELIA. Robert, I shall never forgive you. How can you be so shockingly abrupt? Now our delightful circle is to be broken.

CYRIL. Don't forget, Amelia, Robert and Zita must be very happy over the prospect of going home again.

AMELIA. Zita does seem secretly excited -- like a child who has been told she is being taken to a play. Where is she? (Zita enters.) Oh, here she is, the darling!

ZITA. Amelia -- Cyril -- how good of you to come! And Mrs. Rylands -- I am delighted.

MRS. RYLANDS. My dear Zita, you look quite fagged. I'm sure you must be worn out with packing.

ZITA. No, really not, thanks. -- Madeleine, darling, your charming gift -- I can't tell you now how I shall treasure it.

MADELEINE. Such a trifle. I wish it might have been something really handsome -- like Mrs. Rylands' bracelet, for example.

ZITA. How beautiful! I love exciting jewels.

MADELEINE. But you never wear them.

ZITA. Robert has always thought pearls suit me best. -- Mr. Price, I am much flattered, that in your very busy life you could find time to come to say goodbye.

WALTER. But, as it turns out, Mrs. Harmer, this is not goodbye for me. Didn't you know? -- I am going with you.

ZITA. (Starts.) You are going where?

WALTER. To London, of course. And did you know, too, your husband has been kind enough to ask me to visit you there. I'm really having a hard time to restrain an indecent exhibition of

selfish joy. You see, I'm already imagining how heavenly it will be to steal a march on a city of admirers and have you to myself.

ZITA. You mustn't exaggerate so. Some day I might believe you.

WALTER. Now you see what my life is. At times I become quite abject from self-pity. No one ever believes in me.

ZITA. (Laughs.) Can you believe in yourself?

WALTER. I've never sifted the wheat from the chaff.

ZITA. If you ask me, I think there's a great deal of chaff.

WALTER. Oh, Mrs. Harmer, I can see we're going to be great friends! You know, I've always been a vagabond, only semi-respectable at best, and now you can't imagine how I'm looking forward to getting home again and filling my life with friendships that count. I feel a premonition that you're to be my guiding star.

ZITA. That's odd.

WALTER. Well, it's high time my luck changed. One gets a gambler's attitude, Mrs. Harmer, after about so many years of wandering. I often wonder how people endure it for a lifetime -- women, especially. I've seen them everywhere, living on the fringe of society, pathetically self-conscious of being nobodies headed nowhere. I saw a couple down in Nice last week. The man looked like a decayed artist of some sort, but the woman looked as if she had never existed. You know how sometimes trivial things shock one into a realization of something really fundamental? Well, those two jolted me smartly enough into an understanding of what that word "expatriate" means. Those poor blighters -- maybe it started off by being a case of "all for love and the world well lost", but

now it looks like just an endurance test to the end. Not for me, such a harried and insecure existence. I'm English enough to want my share of invitations from the people who count, and a proper obituary in the Times when the season's over. -- I didn't mean to spill all this. What I'm trying to say is, I've had a bully time in Paris, and all that, but for one, I'm agog to get back to old London.

(Henriette enters with a telegram, which she gives to Robert.)

ROBERT. Oh, Zita, here's a message for you.

ZITA. Excuse me, please. (She crosses to Robert and takes the telegram.)

CYRIL. (To Robert.) Rumors have reached me that I may be considered for that post in Japan. You didn't happen to hear it mentioned when you were in London, did you, sir? (Zita is reading the telegram.)

ROBERT. No, I saw practically no one there except my brokers. Most of the time I was in Wallington.

ZITA. (Folding the telegram tightly.) It's from mother, Robert. I wired her, of course. She congratulates you on your advancement.

ROBERT. Very kind. By the way, Zita, as I was telling Cyril, I spent most of my time on this trip in Wallington, and while I was there I prepared that little surprise for you. I have found MacDonald another situation, and when we go back you shall choose your own gardener. The crocuses are up, and the hyacinths.

ZITA. (She continues to hold the telegram tightly clasped in her hand.) I'm sorry you dismissed MacDonald.

ROBERT. Well, upon my word!

AMELIA. When may I come to visit Zita, Robert?

ROBERT. At once, if you like.

AMELIA. As a matter of fact, I've been a visitor here while you were away.

ZITA. I couldn't have managed without Amelia. She always knows what to do.

AMELIA. Yes, I'll admit Zita has needed some practical advice these last few days. She's been in a dream. Why, I even had to remind her to go to church! In fact, I went with her. We went to Saint Philippe du Roule, Madeleine - your brilliant Dominican preached. I was entranced. I adore being thundered at -- it makes me feel so importantly wicked.

MADELEINE. Oh, you mean Father Hilarion. Was he eloquent?

AMELIA. Oh, most. I do wish our Anglican clergy could be a trifle more emotional. But to begin with, they would never take such a daring subject.

MADELEINE. Daring?

AMELIA. (In a whisper.) Illicit love! -- No wonder the man has such converts, if he can make perfectly innocent people feel as guilty as he made me feel!

MADELEINE. What did Zita think of him?

AMELIA. She said he did not affect her in the slightest.

ROBERT. (Aside to Zita.) It was good of you to follow my suggestion for a farewell dinner. Are Wilfred and Flora Sutton coming?

ZITA. Yes, we're waiting for them now. And Bertrand and Cècile.

ROBERT. Isn't Jean de Bosis coming?

ZITA. No. He -- sent excuses.

ROBERT. Really. I think I can guess why.

ZITA. Why?

ROBERT. He is leaving for Algiers -- at midnight.

ZITA. Oh!

ROBERT. I know because Sutton heard him order his tickets at Cook's. He ordered two sleeping compartments with a place for his servant. So he is not going alone. He is either taking his mother, or --

ZITA. Or -- ?

ROBERT. Or his mistress.

(A burst of laughter from Mrs. Rylands. Walter Price has just finished telling her his latest anecdote.)

MRS. RYLANDS. (Still laughing.) Oh, Mr. Price, I have positively never heard anything so amusing!

WALTER. If only all women were as keen as you to catch a point, Mrs. Rylands. Do you know, I wonder if a man doesn't make a mistake in remaining a bachelor too long. After all, a woman's understanding is what makes life complete.

MRS. RYLANDS. This sentimental mood is new to you, Mr. Price, isn't it?

WALTER. Must be something about you that puts me in it. You know, Mrs. Rylands, you have a reputation for being a very fascinating creature.

MRS. RYLANDS. But too old for flattery.

WALTER. 'Pon my word, I never flatter. As a matter of fact,

I hardly know how to get on with women. But I mean to learn.

MRS. RYLANDS. For a neophyte, you manage admirably.

WALTER. Now, if you were only going back to England, I'd be asking you to take me on for tuition. I could be a first-rate handy man, fetch and carry, and all that.

MRS. RYLANDS. So sorry! But Zita -- she's very -- accomplished. Perhaps she could help?

WALTER. Ah, Zita!

ZITA. (Joining them.) Here I am. Am I in time to overhear something I shouldn't?

WALTER. Only Mrs. Rylands' compliments. Tell me, Zita, shall I find you in London or in -- what's its name? -- your country place?

ZITA. Wallington? I -- I don't know. Suppose I -- drop you a note?

WALTER. Where exactly is Wallington? Can you draw me a map?

ZITA. If I had a pencil.

WALTER. Easy. That's my stock in trade. (He fishes out a pencil from his pocket.) And now what shall we draw it on? I say, you've an envelope in your hand? Do you mind?

ZITA. (Confused.) Oh -- not at all.

WALTER. Here you are then.

(Zita and Walter bend over the drawing.)

CYRIL. (To Madeleine.) What's her name. She has an extraordinary voice.

MADELEINE. Nina Altenbrandt. Startling personality, isn't she?

AMELIA. Tell us about her, Madeleine.

MADELEINE. She's a tempest, a whirlwind -- but a supreme artist.

MRS. RYLANDS. Are you talking about that magnificent new singer? I'm dying to hear her. What's her nationality?

MADELEINE. Mixed. Widow of an Austrian. She speaks most languages. She's been everywhere. Come to my house this week if you'd like to meet her.

(Zita has finished the map on the envelope, which Walter holds in his hand.)

WALTER. Oh, yes, of course. I know that region well. I say, it will be a bit of a change for you, won't it, after all this?

ZITA. (In a low voice.) It's a tomb. I was only half alive there. There's a chill in the very walls of the house. (Breaking off.) But the gardens are heavenly.

WALTER. I can picture you in them, with your arms full of flowers. (He absent-mindedly lays the envelope on a table and as he does so his attention is caught by a paper knife which has for handle an elaborately designed silver monogram.) I say, this is very handsome. R. A. H. What does it mean?

ZITA. Robert Arthur Harmer.

WALTER. You know, I must be a thorough radical. I'm in favor of returning to the good old antique custom of having only one name. Fancy how silly it would have sounded if Socrates had been surnamed Smith.

ZITA. Probably Robert would partly agree with you. To the extent of compromising on two names, at least. He dislikes his middle name.

WALTER. Arthur? H'm -- always makes me think of the Round

Table. But, it gives me an idea -- you're Guinevere! Oh, not -- you know -- not implying a Lancelot. But now I know the line that's been haunting me ever since I met you:

"Oh, imperial moulded form,
And beauty such as never woman wore."

That's you, you know. Mind if I call you Guinevere? Strictly between us two?

ZITA. I don't mind.

WALTER. You know, I'm quite mad about Tennyson. Ever since I visited him for a special article. You wouldn't believe a man who could write such music could smoke such tobacco. Some talk, I hear of elevating him to the peerage. Do you like him?

ZITA. Very much.

WALTER. Then, that shall be my first present to you. I shall arrive at Wallington one day very soon, with his latest edition under my arm. I may as well warn you I shall be popping in on you very often, you know, making myself a perfect nuisance, and all that. I want to tell you all about myself, and then you are to tell me what I'm to do with my life. Success, of the spectacular sort, has escaped me thus far. He's a wary bird, and if I'm to get the salt on his tail I can see I shall need your help. After all, success is the only real motive in a man's life, Mrs. Harmer. I suppose you know that?

ZITA. What about love?

WALTER. Excellent, when it crowns the career. Tragedies are the result of the conflict of the two. Don't you think so?

ZITA. I -- hadn't thought of it -- in just that way.

ROBERT. (Joining them.) You two look very serious.

WALTER. Mammoth subject, sir. Success, with a capital!

ROBERT. Which reminds me of our young friend, who has just leaped to fame overnight -- Jean de Bosis. Oh, Madame Laurent, I must beg your great kindness in delivering one farewell message for me --

MADELEINE. Of course --

ROBERT. To your protegé, M. de Bosis. (There is a general pause in the conversation. No one had quite expected this allusion.) I had hoped to be able to congratulate him in person on his remarkable book, which I have read -- er -- with the greatest interest. I regret to learn from Zita he is unable to be here tonight -- it seems he is leaving for Algiers at midnight.

ALL. Algiers! Tonight! (Madeleine and Amelia look at each other questioningly.)

ROBERT. Oh, didn't you know? Perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned it. He must have meant to keep it a secret.

WALTER. So M. de Bosis is a celebrity? And I have let him slip through my fingers!

AMELIA. Yes, haven't you seen the reviews? The critics say he is a genius.

CYRIL. Someone told me the first edition is nearly sold out. Fancy anything so phenomenal. It couldn't happen in England. We believe poets should be starved, not read.

MADELEINE. Jean has not starved, in fact he is moderately affluent. But he has had his share of difficulties, nevertheless.

MRS. RYLANDS. What sort of difficulties, madame?

MADELEINE. It's hard to explain. Sometimes I think Jean has a dual personality. Two men are fighting in him. Don't you consider that terrifying?

MRS. RYLANDS. My dear, you fascinate us! Won't you tell us just what you mean?

MADELEINE. Jean is an idealist, by nature. Actually he believes in an absolute perfection. But a man cannot escape his generation. Jean is extraordinarily sensitive and imaginative. His other self has been captured by the naturalists. Zola, and his noisy imitators. They scream, they shock, they affront, but they are read. It's in the air. But Jean's temperament could never endure realism. It would destroy him.

WALTER. But, Madame Laurent, has Jean ever written anything immoral?

MADELEINE. Nothing of importance, but for a time I feared he might be hypnotized by the cult of the morbid to the extent of going over to it completely.

ROBERT. Nauseating stuff!

WALTER. If he wants to study the brutality of man, he should follow my profession. Not much idealism left to the fourth estate.

AMELIA. After all, why can't these realists write about nice people? Like us?

MADELEINE. Ah, my dear, because the poor and the besotted hide nothing. They show themselves, they follow their primitive instincts. We may be victims of the same instincts, but we conceal our struggles. Isn't that true, Walter?

WALTER. Yes, indeed. That's why scandal from high places is

such a prized tidbit. It's comparatively hard to capture. There are line after line of defenses. Especially with the upper middle class. For sheer impenetrability I give you the ramparts of respectability. The very great can afford to be profligate with their reputations, but not the honest burgher.

MADELEINE. I hope Jean will escape all this sordid bargaining with life, now that he has apparently set his face away from the naturalists. It would be death to him artistically to write the wrong books, just as it would be madness for him emotionally to marry the wrong woman.

MRS. RYLANDS. Will he marry, do you think, madame?

MADELEINE. Dear Jean! He is always in love -- with his ideal. When realism intrudes, he writes the woman savagely into a story -- and then passes on to the next.

ZITA. And what becomes of the -- ideals?

MADELEINE. I only know about Marie. She took it rather badly and disappeared with an actor. The others were apparently more philosophical.

ROBERT. I had no idea he was so unstable.

MADELEINE. Oh, no, it's not that he's false or tricky. It's just that he's so adorably sincere, and too gentle and delicate and truthful to pretend a passion after the first perfect beauty of it has been marred.

ROBERT. I should think, then, a woman would need a good deal of courage, Madame Laurent, to accept M. de Bosis' love and whatever might be the outcome?

MADELEINE. Do women who love count the costs in advance?

ROBERT. Some might. Especially now that he has become famous, it would be pretty awkward to face publicity alone.

MADELEINE. Oh, Jean is never cruel. And who knows, some day he may find a woman whom he will not write in a story.

MRS. RYLANDS. You seem to understand him very well.

MADELEINE. Don't forget I've known him always. His sister, Cècile, is my oldest friend.

ROBERT. Cècile and Bertrand are coming, aren't they, Zita?

ZITA. (With difficulty.) They said they might be late.

AMELIA. (At the window.) Do see how it's raining.

(Zita breaks out into a sudden, hysterical laugh. There is a brief, surprised, inquiring silence. She fights for control.)

ZITA. Sorry. I just happened to remember a funny story someone told me once about a deaf cabman in the rain. (Her face has lost the secret elation which animated it when she entered the room. Zita is now tense as a bowstring.)

ROBERT. By Jove, I've a wonderful idea. While we're waiting for the others to arrive, let's write a bon voyage note to Jean. I'll have it sent round to him at the station. I really feel most regretful to leave Paris without bidding him farewell. What do you all say? -- Zita, don't you think we ought to send some word to Jean?

ZITA. (Returns in full his challenging gaze.) You think of everything, Robert. Of course -- if everyone wishes.

AMELIA. Oh, I'm sure we do. It will be such a wonderful surprise for him.

ROBERT. Then I'll start it off by wishing him continued success. (Goes to a table on which is Zita's little writing portfolio.)

Zita, have we permission to use your portfolio? and your stationery?

ZITA. By all means. (Robert seats himself at the table and writes.)

MADELEINE. Odd he didn't tell me he was going.

CYRIL. Feeling seedy, no doubt. Needs to escape the limelight. Good idea.

AMELIA. (To Madeleine.) I wonder if Bertrand knows about this?

MADELEINE. Cècile would have told me. I saw her this morning.

AMELIA. I think I must have been very much mistaken, Madeleine, in what I told you and Bertrand a few days ago.

MADELEINE. Oh, my dear -- even with every refinement of language and gesture, how utterly impossible it is either to understand or to be understood! If one remembered that always, life would be too bitter to be endured. Fortunately we forget.

ROBERT. (Rises.) Madame Laurent, you next?

MADELEINE. Stop me, if I write too long. I have a tendency to be loquacious with Jean. (She goes to the table.)

WALTER. I'll look over your shoulder and censor every word. (He holds her chair.)

MRS. RYLANDS. (To Zita.) I think I shall be getting away myself soon, before I find myself alone in Paris.

ZITA. Paris in the summer is just as full, really, only the five or six people you don't want to see are away, and that makes all the difference.

MRS. RYLANDS. My doctor recommends the baths at Harèville. Don't you love the baths, Mrs. Legge?

AMELIA. Madly. One can at least save one's constitution, even

though one may be losing one's reputation.

MRS. RYLANDS. Perhaps you and your husband can join me there?

AMELIA. I wish we might, but I am hopelessly healthy. And there are all these rumors that Cyril may be sent to another post.

ROBERT. At any rate, we can meet in Scotland in October, I hope? Caroline, you'll come, as usual? And Cyril and Amelia, if you are still on this side the globe?

WALTER. (To Madeleine.) I am too jealous to allow any more. After all, a fellow who pops off to Algiers on a whim mustn't expect to eat his cake and have it, too.

MADELEINE. You are a tyrant! Why, I've not half finished.

WALTER. Can't be helped. Far more than he deserves. Now for a word of real business. (He leans over the table and takes the pen from her hand.) Want to see what I'm going to write? Watch: (He writes.) "Congratulations. Your book is topping. May I have an exclusive with you on your return?" Signature, with flourish. To the point, eh? Will he like being photographed?

MADELEINE. He will loathe it, of course. Does anyone like it?

WALTER. You'd be surprised. -- All clear, Mr. Harmer. (Walter and Madeleine move away.)

ROBERT. Amelia?

AMELIA. Oh, is it my turn? (She sits at the table and picks up the paper.) Do we all read what the others have said? It will make it hard for the last ones to be original, won't it?

MRS. RYLANDS. Then I must beg to be next.

CYRIL. (To Zita.) Has Bertrand been able to finish his second portrait of you?

ZITA. My last sitting was yesterday.

CYRIL. Lucky. They say he is to be given the Legion of Honor. I suppose, Robert, the first painting will hang in Wallington, as you originally intended? That is, if the museums will let you keep it in peace?

ROBERT. Yes, I had thought to brighten up the old place with it. I'm immensely pleased it turned out so well.

CYRIL. For a time I was worried -- Bertrand seemed to be muffing it so completely. Well, it will be a memento of your Paris days.

ROBERT. Yes, it will, indeed.

AMELIA. Here you are, Mrs. Rylands. (She gives her chair to Mrs. Rylands.) I've only told him that everything is quite spoiled by his going, and Zita's. When Paris is so radiant, and the chestnuts are in bloom, how can anyone voluntarily go into a reeking jungle?

CYRIL. But my dear Amelia, Jean isn't going into a jungle.

AMELIA. It's Africa, isn't it? And in Africa one can't be far from a jungle.

ZITA. There are worse jungles in Paris, and England.

AMELIA. Zita, darling, you're not given to sensationalism! What on earth do you mean?

ZITA. People get trapped, like animals, don't they? And if they try to escape they only tear themselves to bits on entanglements, which some cleverer intelligence knows how to spread. Or it may be only they are not strong enough to give battle, and they are devoured. Either way, it's hideous.

WALTER. Hear, hear.

MADELEINE. But what's religion for, and philosophy? "Many grains of frankincense on the same altar", says Marcus Aurelius. "One falls before, another after, but it makes no difference."

ZITA. I'm a pagan, not a mystic.

ROBERT. But haven't even pagans their conventions? their traps?

ZITA. It's all quite hopeless. I am probably only suffering from a delayed adolescence.

MRS. RYLANDS. There! Am I the last? No, of course, Mr. Legge and Zita!

ZITA. You, Cyril, if you don't mind. I'm fuddled. I might write about jungles and traps.

WALTER. Oh, by the way, Mrs. Harmer, I forgot to return your telegram. Here it is.

ZITA. Thanks. But -- it really doesn't matter now. (She holds the telegram in her hands irresolutely.)

WALTER. Ah, but it's very important. Don't forget -- you hold in your hand the map of the road from London to Wallington!

ZITA. Then I'll keep it. For a road that runs from London to Wallington must also run from Wallington to London. (She folds the telegram and slips it inside her dress.)

CYRIL. A distinguished signature, if I must say so. Looks even better when set off with red seals, but this will have to do. Are you ready, Zita -- out of the jungle by now?

ZITA. (Crossing to the portfolio.) If not, at least learning my way about in it. Where's the envelope?

CYRIL. Someone addressed one. Here it is.

ROBERT. Close it, Zita, when you've finished. I'll ask Henriette to see that it's sent while we are at dinner.

ZITA. (Writes rapidly, talking as she writes.) How do you spell frankincense, Madeleine? That's a pretty quotation, whatever it means. I'm writing it to Jean as an idea for a poem.

MADELEINE. Spell it anyway. Jean will understand.

(As Zita encloses the notes in the envelope and seals them, the belated guests enter -- Wilfred and Flora Sutton, and Bertrand and Cècile.)

BERTRAND. My dear Mrs. Harmer, a thousand apologies for being so late. Such an awkward thing happened. Our cabby must have been a little deaf. At any rate, he mistook the address I gave him and he has been driving us about in the rain, endlessly.

(Zita stands rooted to the spot, looking as if she had seen a ghost.)

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene 1

(A late April day at Wallington, 1887. The room disclosed is somber in furnishings, shadowy in the corners, with a certain atmosphere of heavy, unimaginative formality. It opens, however, on a flagged walk, beyond which can be glimpsed the gardens, half hidden in a drizzling rain.

(Voices are heard in the hallway adjoining this room. Even before the door opens we recognize them as belonging to Cyril and Amelia Legge. In a moment Amelia enters, followed by Cyril, and Clark, the butler.)

AMELIA. I don't know which is more thrilling, Cyril -- this heavenly, cold, nasty, melancholy rain, or this heavenly, bright, warm, glowing fire. Are you cold?

CYRIL. Numbed -- congealed.

AMELIA. I should never have believed an English mist and drizzle could be so intoxicating. Do you truly ever want to see another cherry blossom?

CYRIL. May I reserve my esthetic sensations until I'm properly thawed? -- Clark, it seems a good idea to wait for Mrs. Harmer as close as possible to this fire. You think she will be in soon?

CLARK. Oh, yes, sir. Mrs. Harmer never walks far in the rain. She will be sorry she missed you, sir. She expected you on the five o'clock.

CYRIL. We couldn't bear London any longer, Clark. Felt like such strangers there, you know.

CLARK. Yes, sir. It's been a long time.

CYRIL. Are you well, Clark? You look not a day older.

CLARK. Oh, thank you sir. Very well. It's a rare pleasure to see you and Mrs. Legge again. -- Let me dry your wet coats. Can I fetch you some brandy, sir?

CYRIL. Good idea. Thanks.

CLARK. I'll send your luggage to your room and be back directly, sir. (Clark goes out, carrying the coats.)

AMELIA. Not a thing changed. It's eerie. I feel like a ghost come back from the other side.

CYRIL. But how reassuring. To find again that England is forever England.

AMELIA. I'm sick with excitement over seeing Zita again. Cyril, after all these years, she must have changed. But if she has, I can't bear it.

CYRIL. But you've corresponded. You must have some idea of what she is today.

AMELIA. None, I give you my word. Zita's letters are charming little masterpieces of masquerade. In reality I know almost nothing of what has been happening.

CYRIL. Perhaps that is because nothing has been happening.

AMELIA. She was most unhappy the first year or two after coming back from Paris, of that I am sure. She must have lost that elan, that transfiguring something which captured Paris. I think she must even have fallen back into her old, listless indifference. During that time I kept imagining her walking through life again as in a trance.

CYRIL. Her hour of fame was brief, wasn't it? And now, apparently nothing but oblivion left for her.

AMELIA. I'm not so sure. I think I read between the lines of her letters that Zita has been different lately. I can't make out in what way exactly. Perhaps not happier, but more aware, more alive. As if she were finding some new savor in life.

CYRIL. Lucky thing you never mentioned to anyone your ridiculous hypothesis regarding Jean de Bosis.

AMELIA. Wasn't I an idiot? It comes back to me now, how excited I was over a possible scandal. I realized my mistake clearly enough that last night in Paris. Why, Robert knew all about the book and approved of it. And Zita even left Paris without saying goodbye to Jean. She told me so, quite calmly.

CYRIL. (Walking about, looks at a framed photograph.) I say, this chap looks familiar. Vexing that I can't remember him. But I connect him with something unpleasant.

AMELIA. Let me see. -- Oh, that's Walter Price. He's slightly fatter. But good looking as ever.

CYRIL. What's he doing in this place?

AMELIA. Oh, don't you remember, Robert rather liked him. He came back to England about the same time. But I can't understand why you connect him with something unpleasant. Everybody thought he was most agreeable.

CYRIL. I never trusted him. He's not quite a real person. He's vulgar.

AMELIA. I'm sure the women all adored him.

CYRIL. Exactly.

AMELIA. Be careful. I think he must have become quite a friend of Robert and Zita.

CYRIL. Oh, really. I still think they are making a great mistake. However --

(Clark enters with some brandy, which he places on a table before the fire.)

AMELIA. Dark, isn't it? -- What time is it, Clark?

CLARK. Half after three, Mrs. Legge. Shall I light up for you?

AMELIA. Oh, no, this gray twilight is fun. It gives me a pastel mood.

CLARK. Mrs. Harmer will be here any moment now. You've no idea how she has been looking forward to your coming. -- Can I do anything more to make you comfortable, sir?

CYRIL. Nothing, thanks. (Clark goes out.)

AMELIA. Cousin Robert gets richer and richer, if one can believe reports.

CYRIL. He'll be down for this week-end, of course?

AMELIA. Oh, yes. He comes Friday nights, Zita says. That's tonight, isn't it? Dear Robert, he's autocratic, but one always knows where to take him.

CYRIL. Odd, he doesn't have Zita go up to London. She must be intolerably lonely here.

AMELIA. I told you, of course, that she has been devoting herself to that child -- Kenneth.

CYRIL. The nephew?

AMELIA. Yes. She's quite mad over him. That pathetic madness which childless women lavish on the first object that presents itself.

CYRIL. Where is the boy now?

AMELIA. In school, of course.

CYRIL. Has Robert adopted him?

AMELIA. I don't know, but he's educating him. I suppose the little chap makes a great appeal to Zita's sensitive nature. An orphan, and brought on here from Canada -- poor little lad.

CYRIL. Robert's not well endowed with relatives, is he? Splendid for him to have this boy.

AMELIA. I should judge the child is more Zita's than Robert's. He adores her.

(The door opens to admit Zita. She stands in the half-light, searching the darkened room.)

ZITA. Amelia? Are you here?

AMELIA. Oh, darling Zita! (She rushes to embrace Zita and drags her forward.) We thought you would never come! Here is Cyril.

ZITA. How dreadful to find you here in the dark! Let me ring for lights! Cyril, how wonderful you are home again! Oh, I can't forgive myself for walking so far! I never dreamed you'd come on the early train. Are you well? Darling, I can't see you! Where are the lights? I was never in such a fever. Give me your hands again. (Clark enters, lights up, draws the curtains.) Ah, this is better. Yes, it's Amelia. Is it I?

AMELIA. Zita, it's like a dream. You are as lovely as ever.

ZITA. How long has it been?

AMELIA. Seven years.

ZITA. A great while since, a long, long time ago. I have died and been born again since you saw me. It surprises me that you know me.

AMELIA. I have brought you the most beautiful kimono. You

will look a picture in it.

ZITA. Are you home to stay, at last? I have missed you more than I can say.

CYRIL. For several months, at least. Probably Stockholm next, but not at once.

AMELIA. Cyril deserves a holiday. We've scores of visits to make --

ZITA. But you came here first! I would love you for that alone. -- Have you been shown to your rooms?

AMELIA. Not yet. Too excited.

CYRIL. I think I'll run up now, Amelia. You two want to talk. I'm only a fifth wheel.

ZITA. The old rooms, Cyril. Want someone to take you?

CYRIL. As if I could forget! See you later.

ZITA. Come back for tea in half an hour. (Cyril goes out.)

AMELIA. Darling, where shall we begin? You must have a thousand things to tell me. First of all, how is Cousin Robert?

ZITA. Much as usual. Except that Dr. Davenport has been cautioning him. You know how doctors are. -- Tell me, you have come straight from Paris? What is the news of Madeleine?

AMELIA. Don't you write her?

ZITA. Don't scold -- no.

AMELIA. Not ever?

ZITA. Not ever. I have written no one, but you. Mother died, you know.

AMELIA. You didn't tell me! Oh, I <u>am</u> sorry.

ZITA. Paris seemed such a dream after I came back here. I

couldn't believe I had ever left Wallington. There seemed nothing to write about. So --

AMELIA. And you've not heard from anyone there?

ZITA. No one.

AMELIA. Zita! How extraordinary! Then I have oceans of news for you! You know we stayed in Paris a week before coming home. We saw everyone. Paris has changed! Everyone is talking about the Eiffel Tower. It's such a marvel. Madeleine has bought a house in Brittany and loves to play she is a peasant. Bertrand and Cécile send you their love. Bertrand even has the same studio, although he could easily afford one twice as large. You know, of course, he has been the leading portrait painter of France ever since your second picture was shown. By the way, it's to hang in the Luxembourg -- you knew that?

ZITA. No. How pleased I am for Bertrand!

AMELIA. Don't tell me you haven't heard from Jean, either?

ZITA. (Dropping her eyes.) Never. Did you see him?

AMELIA. Yes, Zita, and it broke my heart.

ZITA. Why, what has happened? I have read about <u>him</u> in the newspapers, of course, and I thought he was blessed of the gods.

AMELIA. Jean is a broken man, Zita. I think he has never recovered from his great illness.

ZITA. What illness?

AMELIA. Just after you left. Jean did not go to Algiers, after all. There must have been some mistake about that rumor. Instead, he fell ill of brain fever. His mother nursed him night and day. She says he was demented for weeks, and raved continually

about Marie. His mother said to me bitterly, "My son was poisoned by a woman. It was a mischief which can never be undone."

ZITA. (Faintly.) How was it a mischief?

AMELIA. Because it seemed to change the course of his life. You have read his books?

ZITA. Yes, but I shall never read another. The last was too horrible.

AMELIA. That's it. Even in France they are saying that, though such things are true, it's not necessary to be so brutal.

ZITA. But the critics?

AMELIA. Oh, they admit his power, even though he's too shocking. He has been a succès de scandale, and he is known the world around. By now he's translated in every civilized language, and his last novel has even been dramatized. But Jean is not the poet and artist we thought. How mistaken we all were!

ZITA. And he is not happy with all this fame?

AMELIA. Happy! My dear Zita, Jean is the most unhappy man in the world. Truly, you would not know him now. His eyes are hollow and staring. His voice rasps, and he coughs badly. He said such dreadful things to me. Ugh! I shall never forget them.

ZITA. What did he say?

AMELIA. He says he knows his books are bad, in spite of their fame. It seems to prey on his mind. He said: "Yes, I write a new book every year. Why not? It's very simple. It's the same book you see, only the trouble is, it deteriorates year by year. I'm burned out inside. There's nothing new in me." It hurt me so to see him so bitter. Even his whole personality has changed -- somehow

he seemed sensual and coarsened. I was wretched in his presence. He must have suffered. I wonder how much of all this should be blamed on his wife?

ZITA. His wife! He is married?

AMELIA. To Nina Altenbrandt, the singer. Madeleine told me all about their menage. My dear, it must be shocking. They quarrel incessantly.

ZITA. I am so distressed. I thought he would marry some quiet, humdrum girl, have a large family and not stir from his garden and farm in Normandy.

AMELIA. How little you know Jean! Now I am going to tell you something very queer. Don't be angry? Once I fancied you and Jean were in love.

ZITA. How absurd!

AMELIA. Yes, wasn't it? But he did admire you extravagantly.

ZITA. That was many years ago. I'm sure he never thinks of me now.

AMELIA. Strange, isn't it, that out of all the women Jean might have married he should have chosen that firebrand. A genius should never marry a genius. He hates music -- hates her friends. She hates literature, and his friends bore her. She is frightfully jealous, too. They have scenes and reconciliations, over and over again. Once he nearly killed her, Madeleine says. And it's an open secret that she is the woman he describes in his novel, "Le Philtre".

ZITA. Poor Jean.

AMELIA. Fortunately they are not together much. She is almost

always on tour. She is having a magnificent career, you know. Bertrand told me she is the most popular concert singer in Europe today. People go mad over her, and men drag her carriage through the streets. That sort of thing. Has she sung in England?

ZITA. No, she refuses to come here. She says the climate would ruin her voice.

AMELIA. That's like her. And Jean -- you know he has traveled, too. Jean has lectured in America! One of his books had been banned over there, so he was a great hit.

ZITA. I hear a great deal about America of late.

AMELIA. In what way?

ZITA. From Walter Price. He lived in New York, you know.

AMELIA. Walter? You see him frequently, then?

ZITA. Nearly every week-end when he is in London he comes down with Robert. He is coming today, in fact.

AMELIA. Dear Walter. Is he as amusing as ever?

ZITA. Robert finds him so apparently. Besides, they go to the races everywhere. And he likes shooting. He goes to Scotland with us nowadays. Partridge in September and pheasant in November, you know. -- To me, Walter talks a great deal about his work and his ambitions. I -- I am anxious to help him in his career.

AMELIA. How can you, darling?

ZITA. Just a mirage -- probably I can't.

AMELIA. You haven't told me about yourself, Zita. Your letters have been so enigmatic I could scarcely guess. Tell me all that has happened to you.

ZITA. Oh, Amelia, I have changed. Everything is so different.

I was in a panic before you came --

AMELIA. A panic! Darling, why?

ZITA. I was afraid you would not know me, that you would say, or think, "How altered she is!" I can hardly believe that I appear to be my old self, when inwardly --

AMELIA. What has happened?

ZITA. Oh, I can't tell you. I don't know how to explain. One has to change, you know. It's inevitable. The woman you knew in Paris couldn't live in Wallington. Paris to me now is just a dream existence -- Jean -- and all the others -- they are just -- phantoms.

AMELIA. You are alone too much.

ZITA. Yes, I am alone, Amelia. We women who get shipwrecked on these islands of isolation get to know at last how non-essential and impotent we are. Your life is so full of change, Amelia. You can't understand. And yet, would you believe it, I once had a chance to enter a life as full of adventure as yours. You're amazed. It's true. I was needed once. I don't know yet whether I was lost or saved when I -- failed to go. I didn't know then that living is only in daring to live --

AMELIA. I'm furious at Robert for not realizing how lonely you are --

ZITA. Oh, Robert is very wise. He arranges everything. I have only to acquiesce. Besides, there are compensations --

AMELIA. Kenneth?

ZITA. (Glowing.) Kenneth, yes. And -- other things -- that lie perhaps in the future. We must all learn our doom, one day, Amelia, and then seek how to live with it. That's what I've been

doing -- and it's taught me one thing.

AMELIA. What thing, Zita?

ZITA. That courage is the only necessary thing in the world. With enough courage I can still save myself.

AMELIA. Too much courage is dangerous. One mustn't be foolhardy.

ZITA. Yes, it's like dynamite, isn't it? One must learn when to use it. -- Of course you know when women most need courage -- listening to a clock ticking? This house is full of clocks. Wherever I go I hear their interminable ticking, and I know it's my life stream ebbing away. My only life --

AMELIA. Zita, darling --

ZITA. (Recovering.) Do you know how I escape them? In the garden. No clocks there. Robert was quite angry because I even had the sundial removed. In my garden I can almost achieve a sense of timelessness.

AMELIA. I'm sure it's a beautiful garden. One of the sights of England, someone wrote me. Tell me, do you manage it all yourself?

ZITA. (Nodding.) It's my world. I live out there. (Waving toward the garden.) People think Robert does it all. They say, "Nice flowers you've got, Robert. I suppose you do all this. You always were clever." I don't bother to say it's all mine.

AMELIA. How glad I am I came here at once. You are burying yourself, Zita. You must have a change. Let's go up to London Monday, you and I. We'll have a fling -- shop, and buy violets, and go to the theater. London is mad with excitement, you know. They are

already decorating for the Jubilee. Hotels are jammed -- you see Colonials everywhere, and gold-trimmed dignitaries. There are balls every night --

(Clark enters with the tea.)

CLARK. Will you have tea now, Mrs. Harmer?

ZITA. Yes. Here by the fire, Clark.

CLARK. Mr. Harmer has just got in.

ZITA. Oh! (Rises.) Is Mr. Price with him?

CLARK. Mr. Price is coming in directly. Mr. Harmer asks me to say he will be delayed a few minutes.

ZITA. Did you tell him Mr. and Mrs. Legge have arrived?

CLARK. I did, ma'am.

ZITA. Perhaps you'd better tell Mr. Legge tea is ready.

CLARK. Yes, Mrs. Harmer. (Clark goes out.)

ZITA. Sorry I was moody, Amelia. Don't mention it to Robert, will you? He will think I should go and stay with Aunt Elspeth. And really it's more cheerful here.

AMELIA. Do you walk every day?

ZITA. Every day.

AMELIA. You should keep a diary. Besides being fashionable, it would help pass the time. You could write the history of your mind.

ZITA. I shouldn't dare. My thoughts are too wicked. I should be in constant terror someone might read it.

(Walter Price comes in with the confident bearing of a man on familiar footing. He has grown in self-assurance.)

WALTER. Hullo, beautiful.

ZITA. Oh, Walter, don't be impudent -- there are guests. Here's darling Amelia, home from Japan.

WALTER. My word, Mrs. Legge, how well you're looking! I haven't forgotten how kind you were to me in Paris. Are you still as charitable to friendless young men? Be careful now -- the answer to that needs thinking out.

AMELIA. (Laughs.) I shouldn't dream of answering. If I remember rightly, you'd make a headline of it.

WALTER. But you like headlines.

AMELIA. Only when they concern other people.

WALTER. Strange thing, this pudor which smites the Anglo-Saxon in the presence of a newspaper. Now, Zita, here, is a Celt, and I don't believe she knows what you mean.

ZITA. Pay no attention to him, Amelia. He tries to make everyone argue. And he loves to talk shop. Give Amelia her tea, Walter. (Walter does so, and helps himself.)

WALTER. I'm so glad you're home, Mrs. Legge, for now I have a new listener to the story of my obsession. Dear Zita has heard it so often she is in despair --

ZITA. (Protesting.) Oh, Walter --

WALTER. You see, there are three other journalists in England every inch as fast, resourceful and unprincipled as I am. If I could once eclipse them, with one smacking big scoop, there's no end to the money the New York Planet would offer me.

ZITA. Walter, you're not serious about New York --

WALTER. Oh, New York's not such a bad spot, after one gets used to it. The twang is pretty dreadful in some quarters, but on

the whole, I like Americans. Naturally, I'd expect to return some day later on, richly armored against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

(Cyril appears in the door.)

CYRIL. Has Robert come?

ZITA. He'll be here directly. Come in, Cyril. You remember Walter Price?

CYRIL. Yes, of course. How do you do? (The men shake hands.)

WALTER. I've been hearing some pretty fine things about you, sir. Lord Salisbury has let it be known that your services in Japan have been commented upon frequently by Her Majesty.

CYRIL. Awfully decent of the Foreign Office to call me home in time for the Jubilee. After so many years of living for Empire, you know --

WALTER. Amplificator imperii, eh? Noble stuff -- you deserve all credit.

CYRIL. Thanks.

WALTER. Robert not come in yet? By the way, Zita, thought you'd want to know -- the old boy's feeling very low tonight.

ZITA. What's the matter?

WALTER. Something his doctor told him.

ZITA. Oh, I'm sorry --

WALTER. Sh! Here he comes.

(Enter Robert. He looks somewhat thinner, greyer, slightly infirm.)

ROBERT. Hullo, Cousin Amelia! God bless my soul, but I'm glad to see you! Cyril, a thousand welcomes!

AMELIA. Dear Robert! It's wonderful to be home again!

CYRIL. I hope we find you well, sir.

ROBERT. Er -- passably. Well Zita, my dear, this is jolly, isn't it? (He kisses her.) Tea ready? Good, I'm chilled. (He helps himself and Cyril.) Well, Cyril, old fellow, we're proud of your record. Do I hear there's a baronetcy in the wind?

CYRIL. It's hard to tell. London is in such a fever just now. By the way, have you seats reserved for the Queen's street pageant in June, or can I be of assistance there.

ROBERT. Kind of you, but we are already accommodated. Mrs. Rylands' balcony. Zita will come up for the occasion.

AMELIA. Oh, Mrs. Rylands! Is she still in London?

ZITA. Yes, of course. Robert sees her frequently. Don't you, dear? Charming as ever. -- You look a bit pale, Robert. I hope you've not been overdoing?

ROBERT. No, I think not. Well, and how have you spent the week? Any news?

ZITA. The bay mare has foaled. Probably Charles told you. Lady Emily's indigestion has been very bad. I'm afraid we shall lose the new housemaid. She is dreadfully homesick. I think that's all.

WALTER. I say, Zita, ask Robert to tell you about Mrs. Rylands' musicale. We both went. It was tremendous.

ZITA. What about the musicale, Robert? Who was there?

ROBERT. Oh, that unspeakably conceited tenor one hears everywhere. Really, if I have to listen again to his "Maid of Athens"! But the chief attraction seemed to be Sylvia Luke.

ZITA. Sylvia Luke? Who is she?

WALTER. Her father is the artist, Cuthbert Luke -- you know? She's been photographerd as a beauty. A blonde. One of those aureole-crowned angels. And furthermore, what a personality! Imagine, she's on vaudeville now, and she can't be a day over eighteen. That night she did her famous imitation of Ellen Terry. Everyone howled.

ROBERT. I didn't. I thought her unfunny.

WALTER. Come now, you must admit she captivated the crowd.

ROBERT. (Laughs.) I admit she captivated you.

WALTER. The girl's clever. Mark my words, she'll be heard from.

ROBERT. She may be clever, but she's a bore.

ZITA. Oh, now I remember her. I've seen her photographs for sale in the Burlington Arcade. A sort of -- professional beauty, isn't she?

WALTER. I suppose you might call her so. Well, you know how that is. Remember Paris?

AMELIA. Oh, but that was quite different, Walter.

ROBERT. Well, Zita, and how would you like to revisit France?

ZITA. Paris!

ROBERT. No, not Paris, but near there.

ZITA. What do you mean?

ROBERT. I saw Dr. Davenport again today. He advises the waters for me this summer -- as early as possible.

AMELIA. Oh, Robert, where shall you go?

ROBERT. The doctor recommends Haréville. What do you say, Zita? You will come, of course.

AMELIA. A heavenly spot! You will love it, Zita.

ZITA. No, I shan't leave you.

AMELIA. We'll come along, won't we Cyril? And Zita, let's persuade Madeleine to join us there!

ZITA. That would be too perfect.

AMELIA. I'll write at once. And I have no doubt Bertrand and Cècile can run down -- and perhaps Jean --

ZITA. Oh, I think not Jean. He is too busy and famous now.

AMELIA. At any rate, I'll ask. Perhaps he can escape the jealous Nina. Have I your permission, Robert, to arrange a reunion?

ROBERT. Why, -- yes, of course.

AMELIA. It will do you both worlds of good. (Rises.) Perhaps I'll have time to write before dinner.

ZITA. Same precious Amelia. Always full of surprises.

AMELIA. (Presses her hand affectionately.) It's all so thrilling. Come along, Cyril. You must help. (Amelia and Cyril go out.)

ROBERT. Well, rather an unexpected turn of events, eh, Zita?

ZITA. Yes. Particularly so when I recall your aversion to the French. I wonder you didn't insist on a German spa.

ROBERT. Oh, Dr. Davenport says this is practically an English resort. They even select English waiters. -- Well, if you and Walter will excuse me, I think I'll rest before dressing.

ZITA. I'm sorry you're fagged, Robert. Can I help you?

ROBERT. No, thanks. I'll be right again for dinner.

(Robert goes out. A short silence falls, during which Zita's eyes rest on Walter in an intimate expectancy. His manner remains casual, but with a hint of boldness.)

ZITA. Didn't you receive my note?

WALTER. Yes. Forgive me for not replying. I didn't think it required an answer. Besides, I was sent up to Manchester to cover some bye-elections.

ZITA. I know how busy you are. Tell me all you've been doing.

WALTER. After dinner, Zita. Too comfortable now.

ZITA. Don't forget. You know, I live in your world. Out there in my garden I try to imagine where you are and what you are doing.

WALTER. Silly Zita. (He takes her hand.) Lovely Zita.

ZITA. You haven't said I'm looking well.

WALTER. As you know, I don't particularly like you in green. Nevertheless, you <u>are</u> a picture, as always.

ZITA. Only a picture?

WALTER. What more do you want to be?

ZITA. If you were blind, would I still be a beautiful woman?

WALTER. You know what you are to me, Zita. I pour out everything to you. Sometimes I wonder you don't get tired of hearing me talk about myself. You mean a great deal to me.

ZITA. Is that really true, Walter?

WALTER. Quite.

ZITA. Why have I been so excited lately? Nothing seems to have happened, and yet every night I'm anxious for the next day to begin. It's -- almost like being happy again.

WALTER. There! I like to see you animated. Now you remind me of Sylvia Luke --

ZITA. (Fiercely.) I hate Sylvia Luke. Don't speak of her

again, please.

WALTER. For heaven's sake, why should you hate her?

ZITA. You admire her, don't you?

WALTER. Not as I do you -- Guinevere. (A pause.)

ZITA. Walter, I've been memorizing some of those lines you used to read to me. Hand me that book. (He does so.) Want to hear me say some? Here's the place. Begin here. Listen: (She recites.)

> "For I was ever virgin save for thee,
> My love thro' flesh hath wrought into my life
> So far that my doom is, I love thee still.
> Let no man dream but that I love thee still."

(Zita pauses. Their eyes meet. Suddenly Zita holds out her arms. Walter, after a moment's hesitation, seizes her in a long kiss.)

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene 2

(July, 1887. A terrace runs around the angle of a large, ornate structure which could be nothing else than a French resort hotel of the day. The facade of this building is decorated with bunting, and French and British flags. On the terrace, gay with awnings, are small iron tables and stiff chairs where patrons may order refreshments, or sip the healing springs. The hotel is close to a lake. Steps lead down to a boat landing. There is, of course, a bandstand, and players in brilliant uniforms. Attached to the stand is a large poster on which the name of Nina Altenbrandt is prominently displayed. The park surrounding the hotel is dotted with trees, rustic benches, and all the usual accompaniments of luxurious resort life.

(As the curtain rises the band in the kiosk is playing a selection from "Le Petit Duc". The leader clearly feels a responsibility to furnish a few moments diversion to his jaded listeners. Some of the women have dropped their needlework to better catch the phrases. Two elderly military gentlemen, playing backgammon, have not paused, however, and the rattle of their dice puncutates the music. Waiters move at their work among the tables. The music finishes amidst a burst of applause.)

FIRST WOMAN. Is this the end of the concert? It sounds rather final.

SECOND WOMAN. Oh, I hope not. I look forward to these afternoons, don't you?

FIRST MILITARY GENTLEMAN. Dammit, sir, I have no luck today.

SECOND MILITARY GENTLEMAN. Come, I'll give you a chance to get your money back. Will you try a game of petits chevaux?

FIRST MILITARY GENTLEMAN. Right you are. Shall we go inside? (They go into the lobby through the large center entrance.)

WAITER. (To a lady of considerable embonpoint.) Will you take the lighter or the stronger waters, madam?

FIRST WOMAN. The leader is very handsome, isn't he? These Hungarians always are. -- They've packed away their instruments. I think we may as well go in now.

SECOND WOMAN. Besides, it's time to call my husband from his siesta. At what time do you have to begin your waters in the morning?

FIRST WOMAN. My first glass is at six-thirty. It gives me such an appetite for breakfast. (They go within.)

YOUNG MAN. (Who has been quietly sketching at one side.) I say, boy, help me pick up these papers, will you? Is that the post just arriving?

PAGE. Yes, sir. Shall I bring you your letters here, sir?

YOUNG MAN. Yes, and a glass of absinthe. By now my bills must have caught up with me.

(Enter Mrs. Rylands in traveling dress, attended by a corps of pages and porters, bearing luggage and an assortment of picturesque impedimenta.)

MRS. RYLANDS. Find me the manager, please. Tell him my reservations have already been made.

(She sweeps into the hotel, followed by the close attention of all males present. Two young girls enter. They are dressed in the height of extravagant fashion, and are discussing ecstatically the programs which they carry.)

FIRST YOUNG THING. (Triumphantly.) There! I told you so. She <u>is</u> singing from Carmen tonight!

SECOND YOUNG THING. Oh, I'm so thrilled! I hear she is simply ravishing in that.

FIRST. My dear, she's divine. I heard her once in Rome, you know.

SECOND. Oh, how lucky. I've never heard her. I'm simply perishing for this evening to come.

FIRST. Have you good seats? The casino is simply sold out, you know.

SECOND. (A bit boastfully.) Yes, you may be sure. We got our box weeks ago. And is it true her famous husband is coming, too?

FIRST. Jean de Bosis? Absolutely true. That's why they've hung out the bunting everywhere. He's such a celebrity he rarely has a chance to be with her. This is the first time in years they've traveled together.

SECOND. Papa paid Pierre an enormous sum to get our table changed, so we might see them eat.

FIRST. Isn't it nearly time for their train to arrive?

SECOND. (With a small shriek.) Heavens, yes! And I'm still in these rags! Let's hurry and dress. What are you wearing?

(The girls hasten in. Robert Harmer comes out of the hotel. He strolls along the terrace, and finally settles at a table under a tree.)

ROBERT. I say, waiter. Bring me a whisky and soda.

WAITER. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

ROBERT. And kindly inquire if a Mrs. Rylands has registered yet.

WAITER. At once, sir.

(The waiter disappears. Over the hum of voices, laughter, and clink of glasses a distant snatch of song floats in from the lake. Amelia, Madeleine Laurent, and Zita enter from the park. All are in high spirits.)

AMELIA. Oh, here's Cousin Robert!

MADELEINE. Shall we join him?

ROBERT. Your servant, madame. -- Hullo, Amelia. -- Well, my dear? Are you enjoying yourself?

ZITA. We had such a beautiful drive, Robert.

AMELIA. But we've talked so much I'm sure I can't tell where we've been. Isn't it wonderful, Robert, that Jean has finally arranged to come today? Such a coincidence that his wife should be giving her charity concert this very night! Cyril has ordered a special supper in our rooms immediately after the performance. I'm expecting word from Bertrand and Cècile. When they arrive we shall be complete.

MADELEINE. Jean will be furious when he sees the crowds. Already there is a mob waiting at the station.

ROBERT. Won't you let me order something for all of you?

AMELIA. The post must have come by now. Let's get our letters first and join you here in a few minutes. There's sure to be a letter from Bertrand.

ROBERT. Bring Cyril along, too.

(The women go into the hotel. In a moment the waiter returns, followed by Mrs. Rylands.)

WAITER. This way, madam, if you please. -- Beg your pardon, sir. Mrs. Rylands is here, sir.

ROBERT. Ah, Caroline --

MRS. RYLANDS. Robert! I wanted to see you for a moment alone, before the others return --

ROBERT. As a matter of fact, they're here. But let's sit down.

MRS. RYLANDS. Your sending for me -- what does it mean? This isn't your usual policy, you know.

ROBERT. Don't be alarmed, Caroline. It only means that I have

missed you more than usual. And in view of the general reunion Amelia is arranging, it seemed to me perfectly proper for you to join us for a few days. You know Nina Altenbrandt is singing here tonight, and Jean is coming, too.

MRS. RYLANDS. Jean de Bosis! And you are allowing this meeting to take place! Why?

ROBERT. Perfectly safe. I flatter myself I handled that situation pretty conclusively in Paris. If there was an intrigue, I nipped it. But, after all, I've never been sure.

MRS. RYLANDS. And Zita? How does she feel?

ROBERT. Placid as a May morn. I can trust Zita now. Zita has been most dutiful, Caroline. I feel very deeply my own lack toward her. I am sure she knows more about us than she gives any hint of, but she has never once complained. It's her religion, I suppose. She is happy, I believe, in her own way.

MRS. RYLANDS. It seems to me I deserve some credit, too. Please don't forget how harrowing it has been for me. I'm sure I've preserved the amenities. I've been punctilious in all the unwritten rules of the game. Once every month I invite her to my dinner parties --

ROBERT. And once every year she accepts. You have been perfect, Caroline. There has never been a breath against either of us. No other woman could have kept her head so long.

(Cyril enters, looking for Robert's table.)

CYRIL. Ah, here you are sir. Waiting the arrival of our honored guests? -- Oh, Mrs. Rylands! Pleasure, I'm sure.

ROBERT. Strange coincidence -- Mrs. Rylands was taking the

waters only ten miles from here. She heard of Amelia's reunion and came over to join us, for the concert.

CYRIL. You ought to stay, now you're here. And do give us the pleasure of your company at supper tonight after the concert.

MRS. RYLANDS. Oh, thank you. I shall be delighted.

(Amelia and Madeleine return, with the mail. Amelia is carrying an opened letter.)

AMELIA. Here are your letters, Robert. Cyril, two for you. -- Oh, I beg your pardon. Mrs. Rylands!

CYRIL. Yes, isn't it splendid? Mrs. Rylands has driven over from her hotel to attend the concert, too.

AMELIA. Such a charming surprise.

MRS. RYLANDS. I couldn't resist my great longing to see you all again. And here is dear Madame Laurent.

MADELEINE. You must sit in my box tonight, Mrs. Rylands. Bertrand and Cècile cannot arrive until tomorrow. Amelia has just had word.

(A page boy goes through the park, chanting: "Madame Laurent, please. Telegram for Madame Laurent. Madame Laurent, please.")

AMELIA. Oh, Madeleine, you are being called! A telegram!

ROBERT. Boy! Here, boy!

MADELEINE. A telegram! Perhaps Bertrand and Cècile have changed their minds.

ROBERT. This is Madame Laurent.

MADELEINE. (Takes the message.) Probably they are coming tonight with Jean and Nina. Better lay two extra places, Cyril. (Opens the message and reads it; then, stricken, sinks into a chair.)

AMELIA. Madeleine! What is it? What has happened?

MADELEINE. (Hands her the message.) Read it -- to everyone. It's from Bertrand.

AMELIA. (Reads.) "Madame Laurent, Grand Hotel, Haréville. Jean de Bosis died suddenly this morning." (Screams.) "Please cancel Nina Altenbrandt concert. Cècile prostrated. Can you return immediately? Signed, Bertrand." Oh, no! It can't be true! (She searches the message again.) Oh, no! He can't be dead! Why, he was coming to our supper, tonight! (She begins to sob.)

CYRIL. Madame, you have my sincerest sympathy.

ROBERT. Dear Madame Laurent, please command me if I can help you.

MRS. RYLANDS. I am deeply shocked.

AMELIA. (Weeping.) Poor, poor Jean!

CYRIL. Come, dear, try to be calm.

AMELIA. Oh, I wanted to see him happy again! Those sad, hollow eyes have been haunting me. I wanted to see him laughing tonight, and drinking toasts --

(Zita approaches from the hotel. She is in dinner dress.)

CYRIL. Here comes Zita. Who will tell her?

ROBERT. Perhaps you'd better.

ZITA. Why, Amelia, what is the matter? Madeleine -- ? What has happened?

CYRIL. We have just received very sad news, Zita. About Jean.

ZITA. Jean!

CYRIL. Bertrand has sent for Madeleine to return to Paris -- at once. Jean is -- dead.

ZITA. (Frozen.) Dead!

CYRIL. Very suddenly, this morning. Tragic -- poor chap!

AMELIA. (Still sobbing, throws her arms about Madeleine.) I can't believe it -- and all those people waiting to see him this very moment down at the station. Dear Madeleine, what can one do?

MADELEINE. Oh! The concert! It must be cancelled. There is so little time. I must see the manager at once!

ROBERT. Will you allow me, Madame? I will attend to everything for you. Please do not give the matter another thought. (He goes within, hurriedly.)

AMELIA. After all, perhaps Jean is free now. Free from that burning madness. Oh, if only he could have had a few years with the right woman --

MADELEINE. Hush, dear. I think Jean was one of those people not born for happiness. -- I must leave for Paris tonight if I can. Will you dry your tears, and come and help me?

CYRIL. Let me get your tickets, Madame. I will send them to your room at once.

MADELEINE. You are so kind. (Cyril leaves.) Poor Zita, she is trembling -- we haven't realized how this has shocked her. Here, chèrie, you must sit down.

AMELIA. Lean your head against the tree, darling. Can you rest here, while I help Madeleine?

MRS. RYLANDS. Dear Zita, I hesitate to intrude --

ZITA. Mrs. Rylands! Why, where -- ? I didn't see you --

MRS. RYLANDS. Mayn't I sit with Zita until she feels stronger?

AMELIA. Please do, Mrs. Rylands. I'll be back soon -- I shan't be long, Zita. (Amelia and Madeleine go in.)

MRS. RYLANDS. Such a loss. Really, one doesn't know where most

to place one's sympathies. I am quite unnerved -- after coming here especially for Amelia's festivities! Though, really, I should have let you know, shouldn't I? I didn't mean to surprise you so badly.

ZITA. No, you didn't surprise me.

(Two porters begin to remove the billboard on which the name of Nina Altenbrandt appears. A page enters from the hotel carrying newspapers.)

PAGE. Paris evening editions! Extra! Jean de Bosis dies suddenly! Extra!

VOICES. Boy, here! -- Paper, bring me a paper! -- Jean de Bosis dead! -- And they are taking down the concert billboard! It must be true! -- This is a national calamity! (Et cetera, et cetera.)

PAGE. (To Zita.) Paper, madam?

ZITA. (Faintly, turns her head away.) No.

MRS. RYLANDS. Let me have one, please. -- Well, my dear, if you're quite yourself now, I must beg to be excused. I'll have just time to change. By the way, do you think you and Robert would have a place for me at your table tonight?

ZITA. (Tonelessly.) Robert will make a place for you, I'm sure.

MRS. RYLANDS. Thanks. Then I'll see you at dinner.

(She goes in. In a moment, Walter Price enters and, crossing the park toward the hotel entrance, passes Zita's chair.)

ZITA. (Leaning forward excitedly.) Walter!

WALTER. (Turning on his heel.) Why, hullo, Zita.

ZITA. What are you doing here?

WALTER. Haven't you heard the news? About Jean de Bosis?

ZITA. Yes. Madeleine had a telegram --

WALTER. (Snaps his fingers with satisfaction.) I thought she'd be here! I want to see her. Where is she?

ZITA. She's dressing. Cyril is buying her tickets. She's returning to Paris tonight.

WALTER. Not before she gives me an exclusive on Jean de Bosis.

ZITA. But what can you want? Poor Jean is dead. That is the end.

WALTER. Ah, no, beautiful. Only the beginning.

ZITA. The beginning of what?

WALTER. The beginning of my career! Listen. This is international news. What luck I happened to be in France! I had just been sent over to interview the President of the Republic at his inauguration. When I learned this had happened, of course I wired both my London and New York papers. Now America is cabling like hell, demanding more -- more. Even London is stirred. And my old Paris paper practically wept on my shoulder, begging me for a feature -- some sidelights on his life and career. The editor knew I used to be acquainted with him, you see. New York will use all I can send. Jean was one of the few European writers they've heard of over there. They remember his lecture tour -- and his banned books. Not forgetting, either, the lovely Nina's concerts! She has that cosmopolitan touch Americans like, a personality that doesn't freeze them, like the British. Of course, every reporter in Paris is working on this tonight. That's why I simply have to get at Madeleine. She knew him so well, she will be able to give me an intimate biography. If I can get an exclusive on this, I can scoop London, New York and Paris, and I'm made!

ZITA. But what exactly do you want to know?

WALTER. Oh, something personal, something no one in the world knows about him.

ZITA. I knew Jean very well.

WALTER. But not as well as Madeleine?

ZITA. Better than Madeleine.

WALTER. Oh, I say, Zita -- ! Then you shall give me a story. Fancy interviewing you! This is rare. How did you happen to know him so well?

ZITA. I chanced to be connected with a certain episode in his life.

WALTER. Which no one else knows about?

ZITA. No one.

WALTER. Not a love affair, by any chance?

ZITA. A love affair, yes.

WALTER. Ye gods on Olympus! Who was the woman?

ZITA. Oh, but Walter, I can't --

WALTER. Come, Zita, please! This means everything to me!

ZITA. But it also means that I should be quoted -- my name would be connected -- ! Walter, you must see it's impossible.

WALTER. No, I give you my word. Just tell me the story, and I'll never divulge the source. Cross my heart. Just say, "A well known society beauty has revealed", et cetera. Your name shall never once appear in the story. There, will that satisfy you?

ZITA. I don't see how it could be done --

WALTER. Leave it all to Walter. He's clever. He knows all the tricks in the trade. -- Besides, don't forget Jean belongs to

posterity. You owe it to the world. And to Jean. Such an episode would have a rightful place in his history. -- Come, now. Oh, beautiful, please.

ZITA. Quite unthinkable. I don't see why I mentioned it.

WALTER. (After a moment's quick thinking, changes his tactics.) It's quite all right, of course, Zita. I just thought you wanted to help me. You know, you have talked of wanting to do something for my career. A scoop like this would change everything for me --

ZITA. What exactly will happen if you get a -- scoop?

WALTER. Who knows? My guess is I'd sail for New York within two weeks.

ZITA. (Takes a long breath, and plunges.) Alone?

WALTER. (Constrained, his eyes drop.) That is something I would like to tell you about. No, I hope not alone.

ZITA. This must be my second chance!

WALTER. I don't know what you mean by that. I only know it's probably my big chance. -- But of course, if you're afraid -- if you can't trust me -- after our having been such close friends --

ZITA. Afraid? I suppose that's it. I've always lacked courage.

WALTER. I'm beginning to think you haven't meant a lot you've said.

ZITA. Please, Walter -- it's not fair to doubt me.

WALTER. I'm sorry, Zita. But it hurts to have you fail me when I need you so.

ZITA. You need me!

WALTER. I know you've done a great deal for me, and I'm

nothing if not grateful. No doubt, you feel it's been enough -- more than I deserve. I'm sure you're right.

ZITA. I can't think! It's all so bewildering. Give me a little time to think.

WALTER. (Watching her closely.) Oh, it's all decided. I accept my defeat. Only -- it means New York is fading from the scene.

ZITA. (Quickly.) New York! - Walter, if I should tell you only a very little -- would that help?

WALTER. (Concealing his triumph.) Of course. I need only a hint or two.

ZITA. You swear you won't let me be known?

WALTER. Why, Zita, I gave you my word on that.

ZITA. I couldn't do this for anyone but you, Walter. Please believe that. Tell me again -- all the things you've said in the past -- do you still say them?

WALTER. Adorable Guinevere -- always.

ZITA. It's all so vague -- you wouldn't let me be mistaken?

WALTER. It's no mistake. I have promised to protect you.

ZITA. All my life I've been afraid and indecisive. Lately I've promised myself to dare. For your sake, Walter, I will -- dare. (She wavers.) But suppose it should mean my ruin! Will that make any difference to you?

WALTER. Please, dear, don't be agitated. It couldn't possibly affect you in any way. You keep forgetting I've promised your name shall not appear.

ZITA. Yes, of course. Very well, I'll tell you -- just a very little.

WALTER. Dear Zita, you are such a trump! Let's sit here. After all, it's a mere nothing, isn't it, since you know you will be anonymous?

ZITA. I suppose so. Only I'm not used to such things.

WALTER. Now -- this must have happened when you knew Jean before in Paris?

ZITA. Yes. You remember when Bertrand painted my first picture?

WALTER. I should say I do. Let's see. Jean was Bertrand's brother-in-law, wasn't he?

ZITA. Yes. That's why it seemed natural to see him about the studio so much while I was sitting. Then -- soon -- I began to feel Jean was falling in love with me.

WALTER. (Catching his breath.) I see. Perfectly natural. But of course you never met him anywhere else?

ZITA. Oh, yes, I met him everywhere. He was always so tender and respectful. Robert had no time for me -- I was much alone. I suppose that's why I began to think about Jean a little.

WALTER. I understand. And it must have brought great happiness into your lonely life.

ZITA. Yes, I began to laugh and be gay. People were kind to me. I was invited a great deal. It was all so different from Wallington. You know how dreadful Wallington is.

WALTER. And no one noticed the affair?

ZITA. I was so happy it didn't occur to me people might be talking. Then, Jean's book of poems came out, do you remember? And the vicious gossips said all those love poems were addressed to me.

WALTER. (Casually.) M'm. And Robert never knew of all this? I suppose he was too busy to notice.

ZITA. Robert must have learned of it somehow. At any rate, he suddenly announced we were going back to Wallington --

WALTER. (Softly, to himself.) Oh, oh, what a story! (To Zita.) So! That was the end?

ZITA. No. Jean was broken-hearted. I can't tell you exactly how it happened, but somehow I -- promised to run away with Jean.

WALTER. Ah, yes -- you were in love with him, of course.

ZITA. No. I think it was because I was so desperate over the thought of going back to that prison, Wallington. I didn't know what I was promising -- what it meant. And I did fancy I loved Jean. Now I know it was just because he idealized me. It was all part of the enchantment I was living under.

WALTER. But something must have happened. You didn't go.

ZITA. I lost my courage. He had made reservations for Algiers.

WALTER. I remember! That last night -- your dinner party? The farewell letter? -- Jove, you were heroic! Who could have dreamed -- ?

ZITA. Perhaps it's not much of a story, after all, now it's told. Because nothing really came of it. But Jean did love me, I believe.

WALTER. (Jumping up.) Not much of a story! (Quickly restrains himself.) But tell me, was he sore -- over your jilting him, I mean?

ZITA. Amelia told me he nearly died of brain fever.

WALTER. Better and better. -- Look here, are you sure no one knows a word of this?

ZITA. No one. I never confide, you know. And while people may have wondered, no one knew. And whatever they guessed was probably wrong.

WALTER. Well, all I can say is that Jean died at the right moment for me! -- Now, Zita, that wasn't so bad after all, was it? Just a pretty, little, harmless romance, but I can make it a beautiful story that will live in the annals of literature. You've done just the right thing to tell me, Zita. Future generations will cherish such an exquisite, lyric interlude in his life. Furthermore, you may rely on my discretion in the way I shall handle it. Everything will be in good taste, you may be sure. -- Well, beautiful, you've been an angel, as usual. Now I must be off. (A bell chimes.) What's that?

ZITA. The first dinner bell.

WALTER. No dinner for me. I'll be up all night writing this, and getting it off over the station wire. The captions are just dancing before my eyes!

ZITA. Shall I see you in the morning?

WALTER. Not in the morning, beautiful. You must let me sleep tomorrow. I'll need it, I assure you, after tonight.

ZITA. But when shall I see you?

WALTER. Let's say tomorrow night, here, at about the same hour. By that time the Paris evening editions will be down here. (He starts away, then comes back and seizes Zita's hands.) Do you want me to talk to you more about New York?

ZITA. New York -- yes.

WALTER. Tomorrow night then. Just before dinner. And in the

meantime, don't forget you are very dear to me, Guinevere.

(He kisses her hands and dashes off. Zita sits alone under the tree, a look of exaltation on her face. The guests have thinned out in the park, and the terrace is deserted. Outside it is twilight. Lights begin to show in the hotel. Inside an orchestra is tuning. There is another chime of bells then --

DARKNESS TO INDICATE A LAPSE OF TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

--during which the hotel orchestra bursts into a gay Strauss waltz. When the music has finished, the stage is again lighted, showing the same scene of animated ease as that of the previous afternoon. Again, the chatter, the games, the needlework, the strolling couples, the crowded terrace tables, the busy waiters. Again, the page emerges from the hotel carrying newspapers.)

PAGE. Paris evening editions! Papers, please! Life romance of Jean de Bosis! Paris evening editions!

VOICES. At last! -- Here they are! -- Boy, please! -- Bring me a paper. -- Jean de Bosis' life story! Imagine! -- Here it is, front page! -- Good heavens! Look at this picture! (Et cetera, et cetera.)

(During the ensuing few minutes each reader becomes closely engrossed with his front page.)

VOICES. (Continuing.) Listen to this: Lovely bride homesick in Parisian home. -- Thwarted poet meets his soul-mate. -- Meetings im studio of famous painter. -- Scared wife jibs at the last fence.

(The Two Young Ladies are seated on a bench, devouring the story.)

FIRST YOUNG THING. (With a squeal.) My dear -- my dear! Do you recognize this picture? Or am I dreaming?

SECOND YOUNG THING. (Gasps.) Oh -- oh! Someone told me she had been a famous beauty once! Oh, who would have believed she is

so disreputable!

FIRST. Why, we were introduced to them only last night! Mamma will cut her tonight, I can promise you!

SECOND. Her poor husband! How can he face this? In half an hour everyone in the hotel will have read this!

FIRST. I am perishing with excitement! And to think she ruined poor, dear Jean de Bosis' life, too! Oh, what a dreadful woman!

SECOND. I must go tell mamma! And Aunt Margaret! And the De Lacey girls! Do come along! They will all be simply stunned! (The girls hasten in.)

FIRST MILITARY GENTLEMAN. I say, a shocking exposé, what?

SECOND MILITARY GENTLEMAN. The press is becoming more vulgar every day.

FIRST. A ghoulish thing -- to besmirch the dead!

SECOND. What of the living -- this woman?

FIRST. I can't find her name given.

SECOND. But here's her picture. Selected as a famous example of Bertrand's art. A bit of cunning, eh? What's your inference?

FIRST. I say, I believe you're right! What an infernal trick! Someone will recognize this!

SECOND. Someone? Everyone! Don't you recognize it? Look again.

FIRST. Why, it looks like -- the beautiful Mrs. Harmer! Oh, I say, this is rotten! Someone should be horsewhipped!

(The temperature of the assembly continues to rise. Discussion is rife.)

WOMEN'S VOICES: And fancy, they had even planned to meet here.

-- I never liked her looks. Bold, don't you think? -- Really, where can one go nowadays with one's daughters? These women push in everywhere. -- This will be such a blow to Mr. Harmer. -- Do you believe he suspected?

MEN'S VOICES. I had no idea writers had such taste in women. -- Still a fine figure, by Gad! -- These French know how to get the news. Cherchez la femme! Ha, ha!

A WOMAN. But I tell you, I can positively identify that portrait. I was in Paris in the autumn of 1877, when it was hung. Bertrand made his reputation on that picture! She was the toast of Paris that winter.

(Zita appears on the terrace. Papers are hastily folded, glances averted. Some of the women depart at once. Conversation, after a self-conscious pause, picks up again gradually, if somewhat artificially. Oblivious of the effect of her entrance, Zita seeks out again her chair of the previous evening. She tries to read, but her mind is wandering. She is nervously expectant, alight with anticipation. She does not notice that her presence has created a tension among her neighbors, nor that they are rapidly leaving her vicinity. In only a few minutes the terrace is deserted. Robert, carrying a newspaper, comes out of the hotel, searches the empty scene, discovers Zita. His face, already darkened, becomes suffused with rage. He bears down upon her menacingly.)

ROBERT. (Purple with passion.) You -- you -- !

ZITA. (Taken unaware, intensely alarmed.) Why, Robert! Robert, what is the matter? Are you ill?

(She goes toward him, attempts to lay her hand on his arm. He seizes her wrist, twists it violently, and throws her backward into the chair.)

ROBERT. You trollop!

ZITA. (Resisting him.) Stop! You are hurting me!

ROBERT. Hurting you! I should kill you!

ZITA. (Wrenching herself free.) In heaven's name, what is the matter with you? Are you mad?

ROBERT. Mad? No! Seeing clearly for the first time. So you were his mistress?

ZITA. What are you talking about?

ROBERT. You know what I am talking about. You know what this whole hotel is talking about. (He shakes the paper before her.)

ZITA. What is that? Is it tonight's paper?

ROBERT. Don't try to play innocent with me any longer.

ZITA. Let me see it. Show me what you mean. (She snatches the paper and opens it. Aghast, she reads the lurid headlines, recognizes her portrait.) But my name -- where is my name? There is nothing about me in this!

ROBERT. Is that necessary? When everyone in Christendom knows that face by now? This hotel is buzzing with it, Paris and London are buzzing with it. Everyone is saying, "Why, that's Mrs. Robert Harmer! So she was Jean de Bosis' mistress!" Good God!

ZITA. That is false. And there is nothing here which says so. (Wildly.) I tell you, I am not even mentioned!

ROBERT. Be quiet. It's as plain as a pikestaff to any idiot. My name is on every tongue. I heard them inside there. -- This is the end, Zita. I protected you once. I might have known it was useless. I should have let you go with Jean de Bosis. Don't deny you meant to run away from me that night.

ZITA. So you knew!

ROBERT. Of course I knew. Do you take me for a fool? Those poems -- disgraceful. And Paris watching your every move. Gossip

everywhere. I acted quickly. I had to save my name. I thought I could save you, too. What would you be tonight, tell me, if you had gone? A drab, a cast-off!

ZITA. Robert!

ROBERT. More fool, I, that I thought you could ever be trusted to wear my name. I might have known -- your father -- blood does tell eventually.

ZITA. (Stung to the quick.) Stop, Robert! You are a coward to strike my father.

ROBERT. Who knew this infamous story anyway? How does this come out now, after so many years? Who has blabbed? Not Madeleine, or Amelia, I am sure. Who? Tell me, or I'll --

ZITA. (Holding him at bay with her eyes.) Yes, Robert, I'll tell you. I'll tell you a great deal. I'll tell you all you ought to have been told long ago. Listen carefully. I told.

ROBERT. What!!

ZITA. I told.

ROBERT. I see. Revenge. Very pretty. Too bad it will cost you so high.

ZITA. I am accustomed to high prices. What have I given, for example, for Caroline Rylands? Ten years of neglect, loneliness, and humiliation -- to purchase my husband's paramour. She even comes to this hotel, and forces herself into a seat at my table!

ROBERT. Caroline Rylands has nothing to do with this matter. You merely hate her.

ZITA. Yes, I hate her, and I hate you. I am glad the end has come. I meant it to come, only not in this way. But it doesn't

matter.

ROBERT. Explain yourself.

ZITA. We are through with commands, aren't we, Robert?

ROBERT. There will be no divorce, of course. I have ordered a carriage and I am leaving immediately. As soon as I reach London I shall see Hanson, my solicitor, at once, and give him directions concerning a settlement.

ZITA. I think that will hardly be necessary.

ROBERT. (Disregarding her.) Naturally you will not return to Wallington. You have that villa in Dulwich which came from your mother. That is in your name. You can go there.

ZITA. I may have other plans.

ROBERT. Suit yourself. You are at liberty now to pursue your affairs in whatever field you favor. -- There is only one more thing, I think. You are not to attempt to see, or to communicate in any way with Kenneth.

ZITA. Stop! You shall not bring Kenneth into this! Kenneth is mine. He loves me.

ROBERT. Don't be fantastic. Kenneth is my heir. He obeys me. Let him alone.

ZITA. Ah, Robert, you tyrant! You think you can order everyone's lives about just as you please. You do not know Kenneth. He will not truckle to you. For once in your lifetime you will learn what it is to be thwarted. For Kenneth will come to me! Kenneth loves me!

ROBERT. We shall see.

(Robert turns abruptly and goes inside. The first dinner bell chimes. Zita stands motionless

in the gathering dusk. Walter saunters into view.)

WALTER. So here you are! Everything seems very quiet tonight, doesn't it?

ZITA. Walter! I've been waiting for you.

WALTER. Sorry I couldn't come earlier. But really I was done up.

ZITA. Walter, are you leaving here soon?

WALTER. Well, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. -- Let's sit down, shall we? -- You see, there are urgent reasons for my getting back to London as soon as possible --

ZITA. Yes?

WALTER. For one thing, I want to be on the spot when things begin to happen.

ZITA. You mean New York?

WALTER. Yes, it's bound to come now, and -- Hang it, Zita, I have something to tell you, and I hardly know how to go about it.

ZITA. Please try. Just begin anywhere.

WALTER. It's something I've wanted to talk to you about for a long time. But I knew you wouldn't let me speak of it.

ZITA. How could you know that?

WALTER. Because you forbade it once. And somehow I haven't dared since. But I've felt pretty rotten about it.

ZITA. What can you be talking about?

WALTER. Please forgive me, Guinevere. We've been pretty good friends. Naturally, I would have told you first, only --

ZITA. Walter, please --

WALTER. Well, Zita, it's about Sylvia Luke.

ZITA. Sylvia Luke? What about Sylvia Luke?

WALTER. Well, you know, I've been seeing a lot of her lately. In fact -- we're in love. She's marvelous, really. The sort of woman who will make things happen in a man's life. Full of magnetism, and all that. She's terribly interested in my career. In spite of the fact that she has one of her own. That's really why she's dying to get over to New York. We both know she's big stuff in vaudeville, and New York's the place for her, unquestionably. Just as it is for me. We'll both be made over there within two years. That's why we decided definitely we'd make a break for it. So -- last week -- we were married. -- And now, thanks to you, darling fairy godmother, I'm confident we'll be sailing on the next boat. I wish you'd meet her. She wants to meet you. I know you'd like her in spite of the difference in years. -- Of course -- I mean -- after all, she's only a kid. -- But what I'm trying to say is, that this is somehow all apart from my feeling for you, Zita. To me you will always be my good genius. I shan't forget what I owe you. I hope you understand, Zita.

(Zita does not speak. By now it is quite dark, and her face is mercifully obscured by a shadow.)

WALTER. I don't blame you for being surprised. I am myself. Events have moved so fast. -- Let's let things rest as they are for tonight, shall we? Please try to forgive me for not having told you before. I wanted to, all along, but you know you <u>did</u> say you didn't like her, didn't you? That's all over now, I hope.

(Zita is still silent.)

WALTER. And now, I want to find a paper and read my story. I'm

confident you'll be entirely satisfied with the way I wrote it. I handled every detail with the greatest care. Your name never once appeared. You know I promised that. Let me kiss your hands, Guinevere, as always. You're a dream and I'll always adore you. (He kisses her hands. The bell chimes again.) Well, I'll be going in now. I'll see you all at dinner.

(Walter goes inside. Zita rises, takes a few steps, lifts her arms high.)

ZITA. Mother of Christ! I am lost!

(She screams, and falls. Inside the orchestra begins to play. The hotel door opens and Cyril and Amelia emerge hurriedly. Amelia is sobbing brokenly. Two porters follow with luggage.)

CYRIL. See if the carriage is ready and come back as soon as everything is loaded. Hurry!

AMELIA. Cyril, you can't do this! I won't leave Zita like this!

CYRIL. (Taking her arm.) Come along. A fine mess for me to get mixed up in just now.

AMELIA. You can't be so selfish. She needs our help.

CYRIL. We can't help her. But I can lose a baronetcy.

(As Cyril pulls Amelia forward, they almost stumble over the fallen form of Zita.)

AMELIA. (Screams.) Cyril, here she is! Oh, what has happened? Darling Zita -- (She starts to run forward, but Cyril seizes her arm.)

CYRIL. Stand back. Let her alone.

AMELIA. She is ill! Let me go! I <u>will</u> do something!

CYRIL. Amelia, I forbid you.

PORTER. (Returning.) Carriage is ready, sir. This way, sir.

AMELIA. (Sobbing hysterically.) Zita, darling -- Oh, Cyril --

CYRIL. (Pointing.) Amelia!

(Amelia, in wild grief, goes out, followed by Cyril. In a moment the porters return.)

FIRST PORTER. I say, wot a to-do!

SECOND PORTER. (Knowingly.) Women is turrible queer. My missus is like that. Lor' blimme, it drives a man fair distracted. (They come upon Zita, lying in the light from the doorway.) Look 'ere! 'Oo's this? (They peer at her.)

FIRST. I say, it's the lady in the newspaper!

SECOND. Gord! Not the beauty, what belonged to that writer chap?

FIRST. It is so. Wot's she doin' 'ere?

SECOND. She's fainted. Wot'll we do?

FIRST. Take 'er to 'er room, of course. I'll carry 'er.

SECOND. Not you. You a'n't the man for this job. I'm stronger nor you. I'll carry 'er.

FIRST. Come on, mate, give us a chance. She looks like a pretty armful. Besides, you're married.

SECOND. (Picking up Zita.) Out of the way, now. (He holds Zita, looking down into her face.) Blimme, she <u>is</u> a pretty armful! Lor', won't the missus squeal when I tell 'er I've 'eld Jean de Bosis' beauty in these 'ere arms!

CURTAIN

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